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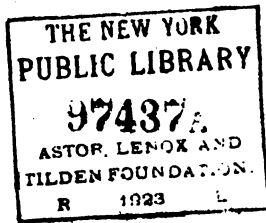
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ED. W. TALMAN.

SEJANUS:

A PASSAGE FROM THE REIGN OF TIBERIUS.

Jam follibus atque caminis
Ardet adoratum populo caput, et crepat ingens
Sejanus. *Juvenal.*

CHAPTER I.

AMBITION.

THE night was far advanced, and silence hung upon the deserted streets of Rome, which the day had seen crowded with the gaiety and tumult of life. Slumber was on all; that season in which the mourner forgets his tear—the poor his misery—and guilt her conscience.

A solitary footfall sent a deep echo through the street. The stranger was walking rapidly, his arms folded, and his eyes rooted to the ground, while the abruptness and occasional hesitation of his step denoted no ordinary excitement of mind. He stopped suddenly, and, amid the surrounding silence, this half-whispered soliloquy could be distinctly heard—

“Ha! doth she falter? By Jupiter! I must bend her to my will, and make her the tool of my ambition. ‘Love her husband!’ forsooth, she’ll say. Why, what barrier hath nature drawn ’twixt Drusus and Sejanus, which Sejanus cannot himself o’erthrow? Drusus is Tiberius’ son. Imperial blood courses his veins; and this same blood gives fire to the eye, beauty to the cheek, and grace to the person. Psha! ’tis a plan this

same nature hath cunningly devised, to make her favorites, masters; and her exiles, slaves! Ha! ha! a throne or death for me!"

Exultingly clasping his hands, as though in the exclamation he verified the richness of his vision, he resumed his pace more rapidly than before. Ambition was, however, spreading her golden net round the mind of her victim, and crime lay ensnared in its meshes—

"Yes! she falters. There—there alone, is my stumbling-block. For what, to me, is his death, if I wed not her? She—she is the tie that binds me to that sceptre—places the diadem on my brow, and makes Sejanus—emperor! That bright vision! How it blinds the eye, and heats the brow! The crown! Then let them *dare* taunt me with equestrian rank, or say, 'He could once boast but a horse from the public, and a single gold ring.' Slaves! I'll lord it yet. Why, Cæsar is but a child, whose temper and caprices I can rule—nay, turn them to good to suit my wily purpose. I have not left a single prætorian in the city—and he believes it loyalty! My images, too —! Ha! ha! the game goes well!"

Checking himself abruptly, he advanced once more at a quickened pace.

The speaker alluded to his own images; the word may require some explanation:—Sejanus had so far advanced in the favor of Tiberius, by the various arts practised by ambitious courtiers, that the emperor, according to Tacitus, styled him, in private conversation as well as even before the senate, "his associate in the cares of government." Nor did the partiality of Tiberius deem even the nominal participation of the throne, a reward adequate to the services of his favorite. His images were worshipped in the theatre, the forum—nay, in that very portion of the camp appropriated to the statues of the emperors, the altars of the gods, and the standards of the army.

Pursuing his way hurriedly, he arrived at the palace, and, having at all hours access to the emperor, passed the sentinels

without stop or question. Turning an angle of the building, a small door, guarded by a slave, bearing a staff or rod, conducted him to a flight of steps; having ascended which, on a concerted signal, another opened, and disclosed to him Livia, the daughter-in-law of Tiberius, the object of Sejanus' guilt and ambition.

Clasping her with a tenderness which the shallow woman mistook for attachment, in brief and subdued tones the artful favorite entered on the subject of his hope and crime.

"Art thou resolved, my Livia?" he said, in a tone which could but ill disguise his apprehensions for success. "Art thou still resolved to linger on in life with one whom thou can'st not love, in that cold and joyless state where happiness denies her smile, and hope withholds her light? What is the throne to thee, if it place a thorn, not a jewel on thy brow? What its gilded pomp to one who sees around her, as in mockery, all things bright and smiling, while within all is pulseless, cold, unloving? Nay, my Livia, 'tis but as sunshine on a grave. Refuse not. 'Tis but a moment's resolve, and ——." He whispered her, and a violent shudder on the part of Livia sufficiently attested the horrible tenor of the words—" 'Tis but a moment, and the blow, which severs thee from him, gives thee to one, who, though he have not the blood of empire, hath still the favor of his prince; a mind that aspires to the crown, and a hand that dares grasp the sceptre." While he spoke, he fixed on his irresolute accomplice a blended expression of irony at her weakness, and resolution to compass the honors at which he aimed. "Who," he resumed, after a pause, endeavouring to seal his success by every argument which the possession of present power and imperial favor could suggest. "Who in Rome dares dispute the will of Sejanus? Stands he not in all, save blood, next the throne? Rules he not Rome's emperor, and wherefore not Rome's people? Stand not his images side by side with those of Cæsar? Nay, worshipped by the same breath which pays court to Cæsar? Two things yet are

needed—the death of Drusus and the hand of Livia.” “I have given thee all,” rejoined the wretched woman, struggling in the toils which guilt had spread, and the expiring sense of duty but vainly endeavored to tear. “I have given thee all that consecrates life, and endears existence to woman. That boon speaks my love for thee. Oh ! ask me not,” she continued, her expression borrowing an earnestness from the contemplation of the hideous act to which every moment gave but a blacker dye. “Ask me not to stain our unholy loves with the searing act of bloodshed. Let him but live.” “And my ambition die ?” retorted Sejanus, sneeringly. “No ! no ! thou, the daughter of a prince, could’st not wed a Roman knight ; but thou, and thou alone, my Livia, can’st change this ring for a sceptre, and his horse for a prince’s train.” “Suspicion,” rejoined Livia, “will be at work, and unmask our guilt.” “Let it forge its worst,” exclaimed Sejanus, in that sanguine tone, which, in the brightness of the prize forgets the danger of its attainment. “She may fix her fangs on the innocent and unresisting, but us she dares not touch. Nay ! nay ! a truce to fear. The draught is mixed, and needs but the hand to bear it. All is prepared, and that hand provided. Where is Lygdus ?” “Within that chamber he watches by Drusus’ couch. But go not there, Sejanus.” “Livia,” he rejoined sternly, and determined to extort from fear the compliance which will withheld, “Thou and thine honor are within my power. One word of mine can ruin and disgrace thee. Choose now. Wilt thou live a despised, dishonored, and unloving wife, or bind thyself to one whose will is power, and whose word is law ?”

The threat was not without effect. Should she refuse, the surrender of honor placed her within the power of a man arrogant from success, who, from participation in the favor of his prince, cared not to implicate himself in the exposure of her character.

“Speak, and on that word hangs thy doom,” said Sejanus. “If blood be shed,” rejoined Livia, trembling, “we must fly—fly from the guilty spot, where the shade of Drusus will haunt

his murderers." "Psha!" retorted Sejanus; 'tis but a fable. With such tales as these thou mar'st my stronger purpose. What—ho! Lygdus!" he continued, whispering as he opened the sleeping apartment of his victim.

A small lamp, whose light scarcely penetrated the distance of the spacious chamber, emitted a wan and sickly ray, but dimly revealing to the anxious eye of Sejanus the slave he was in search of. By the side of his prince's couch knelt Lygdus, his hand clasping that of the unconscious Drusus, and his eyes steadfastly fixed upon his face with that sorrowful earnestness which omens separation, and seems to say, "We look on thee for the last time." So wrapt was Lygdus as he gazed on sleep, and felt it "death's image," that he heard not the words addressed by Sejanus. "Lygdus! I say," repeated the voice in a slightly elevated tone. The slave started from his knee, and relinquishing the hand of Drusus, clasped his own to his eyes, as though to exclude the object, whose presence reminded him of his hideous compact. A repetition of his name dissolved his reverie, and clasping his hands towards the slumbering form of Drusus, as in entreaty for pardon, he approached Sejanus, and with him retired from the chamber.

"Hast *thou*, too, betrayed thy prince?" said Livia, as she observed the sinister glance of Sejanus upon the slave. Lygdus, in answer, silently pointed to the favorite. Sejanus, laying his hand familiarly upon the shoulder of the slave, drew him a little apart, and accosted him—

"When last we met," said he, "I told thee my power, and the terrors of disobedience to my will. Art thou, in truth, so wedded to fidelity, that to spare him, thou would'st make thyself a slave to my hatred, and a prey to the tortures it may design for thee? What to thee is the life of thy prince? Thou but exchangest him for another master, upon whose kindness thou shalt have —." "He never wronged me," replied Lygdus, interrupting him, "Slave!" rejoined Sejanus, his eye kindling on the sudden, and his voice half-stifled from the violence of his

passion, and the effort to choke it, "change not words with me, or, by the gods! thy corse shall rot on the Gemoniæ,* and be dragged from thence to Tiber. He hath wronged *me*. Double cause have I for hatred. He hath struck me—struck me, Sejanus, a blow. That blow shall be atoned by blood! I would have his birthright also."

The mention of blood seemed for the moment to awaken the evil workings of his nature. Hatred and ambition, like spirits contending for the mastery, strove within him, demanding the blood of the innocent; and what the former could not effect from the memory of wrong, the latter was resolved to accomplish from the bright dreams it had woven, and the spell of empire it had cast round the mind of its victim. He broke abruptly from Lygdus, and strode the chamber hurriedly. Suddenly stopping in front of the slave—

"I parley no longer with thee—I give thee no longer space for thought or womanish fear. He *must* die, as I told thee ere now. I have chosen thee, as one nearest his person. Fail me, and a worse death awaits thee, than that to which I doom mine enemy. Speak! Is't done?" "It shall be," replied the man, with that calmness more terrible even than the emotion it conquers. "'Tis well—follow me."

So absorbed had Sejanus been in this interview, involving all his hopes of revenge and aspirations to greatness, that even the presence of Livia had escaped his memory. Turning to leave the apartment, his eyes fell upon a couch. He approached it. Livia rested on it. Her features were ashy—her arms hung helplessly by her side, and, as Sejanus bent his face to her's, the light breath, which fluttered on the lip, seemed more like the parting sigh of life, than life itself.

He kissed her hand passionately, and, beckoning Lygdus, they left the chamber.

* The *Gemoniæ Scala*, were a flight of steps at the foot of the Capitoline hill, where were exposed the bodies of malefactors, and thence dragged by hooks to be plunged in the Tiber.

CHAPTER II.

THE CUP.

'Tis midnight. By the bed of sleep stand the ministers of death! Through the pulseless silence of the chamber no sound is heard save the deep breathings of the sleeper. The lamp is waning in its socket, and through the thickening gloom their coward fancies create those hideous shapes that mock the guilt they spring from. A silent shudder, as of one pulse, runs through their frames, as they look on the stillness of his sleep, and fear to think it—death; and they dare not turn their eyes to the depths of that darkened chamber, where flit those spectral forms in gloom and silence. So stand they—pale, trembling, and speechless—like conscience, when she gazes on the dagger, red with her victim's blood, and vainly strives to wash it out with her tears.

Each grasped the other with that instinctive horror of the moment, which shudders at solitude, and seeks for a human touch, even though it be the hand of an accomplice.

"Hark! what noise was that?" whispered Livia, starting from her trance of terror. "I—I heard nought," replied Lygdus, with hesitation, fearing to lift his eyes from the couch. "Speak not! speak not!" he continued in a tone which sent its deep echo through the chamber. "The hour is full with horror. Oh! that this night were past! That the same pile would consume us both!" "He moves," said Livia, scarcely daring to look on the body, while she noticed the movement which convulsed it. "Speak! speak!" she said, after a pause, clinging for support to the arm of Lygdus. "Let me hear a human voice in this dread hour—but not my husband's groan."

As she uttered the word, the sound she so much dreaded broke on her ear the more fearfully for the aching silence which preceded it. A violent convulsion followed, in which the dying man seemed struggling with some invisible forms.

"Not dead—not cold—yet," he gasped. "My wife—Lygdus—I am dying! Where—where—are ye?" They turned, and beheld his distended fingers grasping some imaginary object. His arms fell, and, respiring with pain, he sank back.

"He is gone," said Lygdus, with that stern composure which anticipates, and is prepared to brave the worst. "The cursed work is finished. Gods!" he continued, clasping his hands in the horror of the moment, as he gazed upon his lifeless master, "That I should have slain my prince! Driven by threat to take thy life! But there is justice yet among the gods. The thunderbolt may slumber, but its fires are not extinguished. Speak! speak to me, my master," he cried frantically, kneeling by the couch, and pressing the hand to his lips, which life was fast deserting. "Speak—oh! speak! though it be to curse me. Cold! cold!" he muttered, as the relaxed and icy touch of the dead seemed to vibrate to his heart. His head fell upon the lifeless hand, and the tear of remorse and bitterness warmed the clay which crime had chilled.

"Rise! rise!" exclaimed Livia, looking round the chamber in terror. "Let me hear thee speak—let me feel thy hand, even though it have the stain of blood—Lygdus! speak—speak to me." "Cold! cold!" was the reply. "Ha! do I live a murderer?" cried the slave starting to his feet, and looking wildly upon his outstretched hands, "no blood upon them!—Yet, a murderer! Fool! fool! cannot the thread be severed, without blood? Aye! there, cold—lifeless—poisoned!" "Lygdus, thou wilt not leave me thus—at midnight—and in the presence of the dead!" cried Livia, clasping in her own his hands, which trembled as they pointed to the body. "Cling not thus to me, lady," groaned the guilty man, "I am even as weak as him we look on. Would I were as cold! I'll gaze no more. It freezes my blood. It maddens my brain—I'll gaze no more!" He was about to burst from her, when the wretched woman sank upon her knees. "By the gods! I ad-

jure thee, Lygdus—leave me not.” Her prayer of agony fell vainly upon ears, deaf to all save the horror of the dying groan which still rang there. “Cold! cold! my master,” he exclaimed, as he rushed from the chamber, regardless of her humiliation or terror.

Still pursuing his way with the speed of despair and guilt, he reached the passage beyond the chamber, in which the last fatal interview was held. By the dim light which issued from the chamber of death, he discovered a male figure pacing to and fro, impatiently. Approaching him, the determined grasp, and hurried whisper, disclosed Sejanus.

“How, now, slave? Do'st tremble? Is't well? Lives he! Doth he linger? Speak—fool!” cried the murderer, petulantly, apprehending failure from the agitation of Lygdus. “Cold—dead”—reiterated the slave incoherently, falling at his feet. “Away, coward!” exclaimed Sejanus, spurning with his foot the wretched being as he lay prostrate and trembling on the ground. “By Jupiter! 'tis well thy hand hath not misgiven, and the poison failed.”

Hastily crossing the chamber, he entered the apartment of death, and recoiled at the dreary images which addressed his senses. His victim lay in that wild disordered position, in which the imaginary struggle preceding death had left him—his hands firmly clinched, and his set teeth shewing hideously through his parted lips; while the miserable wife still knelt as when Lygdus left the chamber. The unbroken silence of death reigned there—and Sejanus started, as a deep sigh from Livia fell on his ear. She looked up. Their eyes met. She rushed forward, and grasping his arm—

“Come kneel with me, and curse me—even me,” she cried. Lost in honor, and a murderess! Curse me, even though death itself hear thee. So shall it bind eternally. If we have loved, what hath it brought us to! Let death witness the marriage rite, and his cold hand bless our loves.”

She endeavoured to lead him towards the couch, when Sejanus, who could regard death unmoved, when it was the tool of ambition, drew her to his breast.

"Nay—nay, my Livia," he said tenderly, "our loves have been hitherto unblessed. What hinders now all that the fullness of our hearts can dream or create. 'Tis late. Let's from this gloomy chamber. Betimes I will in the morning to Cæsar. Come—now art thou my queen."

Was there no omen in the murderer's heart of the issue of that love, whose vows were uttered by the bed of death! Was there no mysterious voice in that silent and guilty hour, which chilled the ardor of passion with the coldness of the tomb, and warned them that the shadow of death was even now spreading its wings to veil its brightness? So is it, alas! too often in this world with love. The cypress more frequently shades his temple than the myrtle; and the vows we offer at his altar are but so many tributes to the weakness of our own nature, which mocks us with the dream of happiness. The sweetest draught of love is embittered by the single drop—the fear of separation mingles there; yet the heart loves on, though the tie be broken, and death has claimed for his own the form we cherished. The sigh of rapture may soon be changed for the tear, as the dew which adds sweetness to the flower turns to the rain which bends and breaks it; and despair scatter the last remnant of our joys from the urn in which youth and hope had placed them.

CHAPTER III.

TIBERIUS.

THAT was a long and weary night for the murderer. He returned not home, but slept within the palace, for the purpose of being the first to gain audience of the emperor, and use his wonted art to temper any undue emotion, which the unexpectedness of the event might produce. In this, however, he calculated more upon the known disposition of Tiberius, than any weapons of deceit he himself could use. Cold and apathetic to feeling and circumstance as the favorite by study of his master's character knew him to be, Sejanus felt that the influence he had already acquired would ensure a ready currency to any fabrication he might build upon the prince's death, and mould it also to his own ambitious purpose of advancement.

Early in the morning he approached the state-entrance to the palace, already crowded by a numerous train of clients, arrayed in white togas, their usual costume when they came to solicit the interest and patronage of the great. At the sight of the favorite, the crowd, as with one impulse, fell back, yielding him a free passage to the gate. Advancing to the emperor's private chamber, in a few moments he was in his presence.

"What means this early visit?" said Tiberius, looking up from some papers he was perusing, and with surprise noting the abrupt entrance of Sejanus. "Is all well in the camp and city? Prospers thy new design of withdrawing our prætorians from Rome?" "All is well," replied the favorite, "in the camp and the city." "But ——" "What?" inquired Tiberius, hastily. "The Fates are unpropitious to Cæsar in his palace," replied Sejanus, dissembling grief in tone and manner. "Speak! What hath befallen?" exclaimed Tiberius, with more impatience than he was wont to exhibit. "Drusus, thy son is dead! The joy of Rome hath departed, leaving her emperor childless, and her throne without an heir!" As he spoke, the eye

of the favorite narrowly scanned the visage of his master, and Sejanus trembled for his own fate, as he beheld the tears of the father for the moment supersede the characteristic coldness of the prince.

"My son gone!" muttered Tiberius, after a pause. "Then are we, indeed, childless. The gods have cursed Rome! Germanicus gone! And now my son—not one hope left!"

At the mention of Germanicus, he shuddered, as the name revived the memory of the guilty design himself had formed, and caused to be executed for the removal of his nephew. He rose from his seat, endeavoring to conceal his emotion.

"How knowest thou this?" Hast thou been to his chamber? Hast thou seen the princess Livia?" were the incoherent questions he abruptly put to Sejanus. "This morning I heard the fatal news," replied the favorite, after a moment's hesitation, "and sped hither to acquaint my lord." "'Tis ill news, and bodes not good to Rome," rejoined the Emperor, with a dissembled calmness which seemed to rise superior to fate or the accidents of life. "Yet," he continued, "the gods have not left Rome deserted. Here are pledges that her throne shall not remain empty."

The youths, to whom Tiberius pointed, were Drusus and Nero, the offspring of the warrior Germanicus. "Let's to the chamber," said the emperor, taking them by the hand, and leading the way.

On entering the apartment all things were as they appeared on the previous night to the murderer. The servants of the household crowded round the couch with that fearful silence, which nature ever exacts as homage to the presence of the dead. Terror and dismay sate on the countenance of each, as men who feel that mystery and judgment are upon them, and they scarcely raised their eyes from the body in recognition of the emperor's approach.

"No mark of violence," observed Sejanus, directing the attention of Tiberius to the couch. "There has been a strug-

gle, but it was one of nature." "Who saw the princess to-day?" inquired Tiberius abruptly, his eyes fixed upon his son, and disregarding the remarks of Sejanus. A female attendant replied, "that she had retired to another chamber, and refused to see any one."

Tiberius gazed a few moments on the body, and, presenting Drusus, said to those assembled, "My people look on your prince. Germanicus hath left Rome a son." "Not while Cæsar is emperor," interposed Sejanus. "We will speak of that in private," replied Tiberius, as he turned to leave the apartment. "The offspring of Germanicus shall never reign," thought Sejanus, as he darted a malignant expression upon the young prince, and followed Tiberius in silence.

CHAPTER IV.

THE OATH.

Who is she who bends over that sleeping form, soothing its turbid dreams, and watching it with a mother's care? Vainly fall the tones of comfort on the ear of guilt—vainly as a ray of the wintry sun upon the stormy sea. The hours of departed innocence—the memory of faded joys, of other days and other feelings, pass like spectres through the waste of the guilty mind; and the only sound that wakes its silence is the voice of conscience.

'Tis Agrippina, the Roman matron, "the last remaining model of ancient manners"—the widow of the murdered Germanicus. With tenderness she soothes that sister's brow, and stills the wandering thoughts which break through her guilty dreams.

"She wakes," said Agrippina, clasping the hand of Livia, and pressing her lip to her's. "Where am I?" said the guilty

woman, rising from her couch, and looking round her wildly. "What are they? They ~~are~~—they, who haunt me in my dreams, and when I wake!" "Be still, my Livia," replied Agrippina, unconsciously clasping a murderess to her heart. "There are none here, but I, thy sister." "I tell thee," rejoined the wretched woman, clinging more closely to her for protection against her visionary horrors, "thou see'st not as I see. A thousand forms are there before me! Their fingers point at, and mock me! Their eyes gaze on me with the glare of fire! Shield! shield me, Agrippina!" She sank her head upon her bosom, extending her hand convulsively against the imaginary shapes which haunted her. "Nay! fear not, sister," rejoined Agrippina, soothingly. "These, thou speakest of, are but the spectres of thy fancy. Thy mind is troubled; thou needest rest." "Rest!" responded the guilty woman. "Where is there rest for me? Not till my pile be lit, and my ashes placed in their urn. Oh! Agrippina! would that I were dead! Drusus is gone, and left me—" "'Tis the will of the gods," returned Agrippina. "Their wrath hath fallen on me, also. I also have seen a husband die."

While she yet spoke, a deep and prolonged flourish of trumpets, accompanied by the gentler sound of flutes, sent its echo through the court before the palace.

"It is his funeral," said Livia, "leave me not alone with those sad and dismal sounds."

The sounds alluded to, were preparatory to the departure of the funeral-train from the palace. In the centre of the court, upon a couch covered with cloth, embroidered with purple and gold, lay extended the body of Drusus, surrounded by a troop of prætorians, and those appointed to bear the bier. The lictors bore their fasces inverted, and the military carried their spears pointed to the ground.

First in order went the trumpeters, and the musicians upon different instruments. Then the freedmen of the deceased; between whom and the corpse were borne the images of Drusus

and his ancestors ; Æneas, the kings of Alba, Romulus, and the Sabine nobility, supported on couches. Next to the body followed the friends of the dead, clad in mourning ; and after them the public magistrates and nobility divested of their ornaments and insignia. A second flourish was heard, and the procession moved onward.

Before the trumpets sent forth their second peal, a step was heard hastily ascending the stair conducting to Livia's apartment ; and Agrippina beheld Tiberius enter.

His countenance was flushed, and his manner betrayed unwonted excitement.

"There is treason here," he exclaimed with anger, as he entered the chamber hastily—"treason to our son and to our throne. A cup hath been found beneath the couch of Drusus. Guilt hath betrayed herself. Speak! Livia! Knowest thou aught of this?" "Nought," replied Livia, in a stifled tone, scarcely raising her head from the bosom which sheltered it. "Nought!" reiterated Tiberius, with a sternness of expression, as though he would drag the foul secret from its hiding-place. "So may the gods visit me, if I know ought of it!" cried the miserable woman, clasping her hands to heaven.

The drug had been mixed, and the dead was now passing to his tomb. The living was bound with the chain of guilt, and perjury rivetted the last link which fear had forged.

"Enough!" said Tiberius, as the second burst of music announced the advance of the procession. Looking on it for some moments abstractedly, his attention was arrested by a man, who, seemingly unconscious of all that passed around him, stood rooted to the spot from which he had looked his last upon the dead!

"'Tis Lygdus!—'Tis his slave!" exclaimed the emperor. Livia shuddered as she heard the name. Tiberius hurried from the chamber, and ordered him to be seized ; but, ere the command could be obeyed, the wretched man, with the shriek of madness, had rushed from the spot, where stood his master's image, and the spectre of his own crime.

CHAPTER V.

THE SENATE.

No sooner had the obsequies of Drusus been performed, than Tiberius proceeded to enforce his intentions as to the succession of Germanicus' offspring.

For that purpose he appeared in the senate-house, with Drusus and Nero, to test the opinion of the Fathers, as to the propriety of the measure.

"Conscript Fathers," said Tiberius, in a firm and collected tone, "these are the orphans of Germanicus, whose life was offered for his country, and whose exploits gave glory to her eagles. Drusus, my son, is no more, and with him have perished the hope of my people, and the last of the imperial line. But let it not be thought that the gods in their judgment have visited the sire, to despoil his throne, and overturn its strength. No! the sons of a soldier and a prince, stand before ye, in whose young and tender minds may be seen those germs of virtue and honor, whose loss, in the death of their sire, made Rome a place of mourning, and gave her people tears, as for a brother's death. These orphans have been trained in a manner worthy the lofty name they bear, the virtues they inherit, and the high hopes they are called on to fulfil. For the completion of those hopes, Conscript Fathers, to you I would intrust them—to your care I would confide them as to those, who, in the regulation of the youthful mind, forget not that they control the conduct, the principles, and the character of the man."

The recent domestic calamity of Tiberius, the solicitude he expressed for the welfare of his empire, and the children of Germanicus awakened the sympathy and gratitude of the assembly. A general murmur of grief and admiration pervaded it, and a decree was passed for votive offerings and supplications for the prosperity of Rome, and the health of her adopted heirs.

CHAPTER VI.

GUILT AND LOVE.

THE dead had been consigned to the tomb, while the silence which followed his murder, lent a fresh stimulus to ambition, from the very security it gave to crime. 'Tis ever thus with guilt. Slow and cautious in her advance, she woos us rather with the coyness of the maid, than the boldness of the courtesan. At every step we feel an additional link of her chain, till bowed and weighed down with the load, too late we find, that, like the Minotaur, her sacrifice is a human victim.

Unawed by the superior elevation of the prize at which he aimed, and urged in his dreams of ambition by the success which attended his first step to empire in the murder of his prince, Sejanus was firmly bound in hope and aspiration to the throne of Rome. His visits, private and unknown to Tiberius, were still frequent to the chamber of Livia, as upon his union with her alone were based his hopes of sovereignty. Still he feared by too rapid a disclosure of his aims to Tiberius, to awaken his suspicion, and from day to day he deluded the wretched woman with promises, which, she thought, sprang from his attachment, while their true source was the ambition of imperial alliance.

"Nay! how thou do'st ever wander from the theme," she said, during one of his customary visits, as with his usual policy he endeavored to avoid the subject of her constant solicitation. "When shall I be thine honored wife? When shall the torch be lit, and the corn* scattered at our bridal? Oh! Sejanus, thou would'st not be thus tardy to fulfil my will and thine, did'st thou but know the madness and the sting I bear as the widow of the murdered. Make me then thine before Cæsar and the priest, and ——." "Rash girl," replied Sejanus,

* Corn was scattered at a Roman bridal by the officiating priest, in presence of ten witnesses, hence the title of the ceremony—*Confarreatio*.

interrupting her, "Would'st thou, by this last and unguarded step rend open the suspicions of Cæsar, and fix the eyes of assembled Rome upon ourselves. Thou know'st my love, else would I not have hazarded name, honor, power, and the high estate I have reached by favor. That eminence so dearly bought must not be held as cheaply as the mere sunshine of a moment, shed on courtiers only to turn to frowns and darkness. Thou shalt be mine, my Livia; but the times are yet unfit." "Thy wife!" interposed Livia. "Boasts not the Cæsars' blood," rejoined Sejanus, with difficulty curbing the ebullition of ambitious aim; "but," he continued, as he felt the injudicious nature of the disclosure, "what, to me, are the imperial line—its pomps and honors—to that love which hath ever bound me to thee!" "And made me—" said the wretched woman. "It matters not now," rejoined the murderer, anxious to dispel from their intercourse the associations of guilt. "It matters not now. Hast thou seen Lygdus?" "Not since the fatal night," replied Livia, looking round the chamber, as imagination revived the work of terror. "Ha! he must be cared for," said Sejanus, hastily. "It were not for our safety his conscience should have its play. The prison and the fetter, methinks, were meeter mates for him than freedom. That fellow must be cared for," he continued, muttering to himself, as caution wove her subtle chain of expedient. "He may betray us." "We are already betrayed," replied Livia; "the cup hath been found—and but for ——" "But, for what? Well—speak," said Sejanus, his eyes fixed full on Livia, and his lips half-parted with terror. "Perjury," said the guilty woman. "To the gods and man, the foul secret had been told. Oh! Sejanus," she cried, after a pause, sinking on her knee, and imploring him with tenderness and passion—"Let us fly this guilty roof. This foul corrupted den—where murder stalks the tenant of the place, and gives to mid day the blood-stained horrors of the night! Let's fly—fly! while time is ours, and freedom offers her priceless boon. What is light or life to the guilty soul, which aches at the dawning ray

that brings bliss to others, and whose only throb is the stinging sense of existence. In guilty hour we met, to part with the stain of blood upon our hands—its weight upon our soul; and the groan of death to haunt and curse its ministers. Fly—fly! with me, then—nor leave me here, to curse myself and thee.”

“Fear not. All shall be well,” said Sejanus. “Why, girl, do’st tremble thus? The road to empire lies before me. All obstacles are swept as chaff from my path—except ——”

A shade passed athwart the brow of that ambitious man, as memory revived the names of Drusus and Nero.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SNARE.

“THOU know’st then nought of this?” said Tiberius, some few days after the events of the preceding chapter. He held a small paper in his hand, and, addressing Agrippina, read from it as follows—

“Beware the blood of Germanicus,—
It aspires to rule!”

“Nought,” replied the Roman matron, her noble features flushed with disdain at the suspicion cast upon her sons. “Why, my lord,” she said, “should thy nephew’s blood be an object of terror to thee or thy people? Commander of thy legions—hath he ever turned their spears against thy throne! Victorious—hath he ever used the pride and glory of conquest for himself or his offspring. He, who inscribed these lines,” she continued, the proud blood of Augustus flashing from her eye, and glowing on her cheek, “is but unworthy thy notice. ’Tis base to slander the dead; but baser far to raise up enemies against the unguarded widow and the orphan.” “This,” replied Tiberius, scanning the paper closely, and unwilling to admit the impression of a generous sentiment. “This but confirms the tales

now rife within our walls." "Tales! my lord," reiterated Agrippina, haughtily. "They be, I fear indeed, but *tales* propagated for the inventor's use." "I tell thee, lady," replied Tiberius, fixing on her a searching eye, which met in return the undaunted gaze of the matron, "that thine, and thy sons' ambition, are the theme of every tongue." "'Tis false!" rejoined Agrippina, daunted neither by the weight of the charge, nor the presence before which she stood." "For myself, I am innocent, and, as their mother, have never failed to teach them love to you as one of their kindred, and respect as their prince. And, for themselves, 'twere well if Cæsar called to mind that the first lesson of ambition they received, was from his own lips, in the presence of the Fathers. Judge now, my lord, of the stability of this charge; and, as *Emperor*, tremble at the ambition of my sons." "Lady, provoke me not," replied Tiberius, scarcely raising his eyes from the paper, which trembled in his hand from the strength of passion, "Provoke me not. Thou and the princes are within my power. I can place thine eldest Drusus on the throne, or crush his hopes for ever. Think not the faded glory of the warrior hovers like a halo round his urn, to consecrate his own ashes, and give light to those who trace his line. No! with the broken sword hath parted the glory; and with life the name which saved and guarded thee. Germanicus is gone, and I protect his children." "Not while their mother lives," rejoined Agrippina, the tenderness of maternity blending in her expression with the pride of her lofty line. "Their sire perished foully, even by the very means which have been appointed for thine own son; and yet though the poisoned hand holds high dominion within thine own walls—sits at thy board, and marks out thine own son, thou hast neither will nor power to discover or to punish. Thou who could'st not save thine own, how can'st thou guard another's?"

The allusion to the death of Germanicus was even more galling to Tiberius, than the recent loss of his own son. It at once revived the memory of his participation in the act. Anx-

ious to liberate himself from his own thoughts, he turned to the charge of incapacity to punish.

"Thy husband was avenged," he said. "The poisoner died."
"By his own hand," rejoined the matron. "The law dared not touch him, who was but a tool in the hands of ——." "Whom?" said Tiberius, hastily; and, as quickly checking himself, "We wander from the theme. I acted all too rashly with thy boys, in bringing them before the Fathers, and telling them the high hopes to which they were destined. Inquiry shall be made as to the writer of this, and thou and thy children but stand higher in the favor of thy prince, if these suspicions be found false."
"Take heed," said Agrippina, regarding him sternly as she withdrew from the apartment, "that the writer of that aspire not himself to rule. For myself, doubly allied to the throne by blood and marriage, I seek not to attain by wile, what I cannot reach by right." "By the gods!" exclaimed Tiberius, as her affinity to the throne flashed upon his mind, "that matron's pride and lofty bearing bespeak the blood of Augustus. There may be truth in this paper, though it bear no name—she, who *feels* her alliance to the throne, will not be slow in asserting her right."

CHAPTER VIII.

APICATA.

THE net, which had been spread for the offspring of Germanicus, was gradually weaving its meshes around the fortunes and representatives of that fated house, and the hereditary honors of the departed soldier, were but a lure for the ruin of his widow and orphans. The undaunted demeanor and bold

speech of Agrippina lent a sanction to the suspicions of Tiberius, founded on the paper he had received ; and created apprehensions lest the memory of his nephew's achievements, and the lofty lineage of his widow might conspire to the instability of his throne. These fears had been expressed to Sejanus, who did not hesitate to foster them in the emperor, and bend them to his own purpose.

"Could I but sweep them from my way," said the favorite, musing in his apartment, "all would be as I could hope or aim, could I but subdue her pride, and make her feel that, with the glory of the sire, have perished the hopes of the sons, could I —! But why do I perplex myself about boys, when I can rule the throne, and play on the mere machine that fills it to sound what note pleaseth me? Ha! ha! Sejanus, thou art rising above the equestrian rank to which birth had doomed thee, and fortune, may perchance—Who's there?" he enquired hastily, starting from his ambitious dream. "'Tis I, thy wife—Sejanus," replied Apicata, as advancing she sought his embrace.

Unheard fell that tone of tenderness, and unfelt did that arm clasp a breast unawakened by any impulse of nature, and senseless to every throb save ambition. The vow of passion was forgotten with the breath which gave it birth ; and the flowers which consecrated the altar, seemed now but to adorn the grave. Love wept in silence as he beheld a ruder hand disengage, link by link, the chain he had woven in happier hours—the bridal torch extinguished, and the hearts he had made one sundered for ever.

"Why, my love," said Apicata, endeavoring to win him by gentle art from his solitary musing, "Art thou thus cold and distant to me? Lost in thy thoughts, I ever pass unnoticed by thee. Tell me, Sejanus, why is this?" "I know not," replied her husband petulantly, evading the question, "I am to thee as ever. But of late my time hath been occupied with things of moment. Between the palace and the camp, thy husband hath but little time for the gentler themes of home." "Nay," re-

joined Apicata, playfully, "to hear thee thus speak, and forswear all ties save those of state, we might think thou wer't wedded to the throne itself." "The throne, rejoined Sejanus, starting from her embrace, and in his abstraction hearing but the last expression—"the throne! Who told thee that I——? Woman, thou ravest." "Nay," said Apicata. "I spoke but jestingly." "'Twere better seek another theme," replied Sejanus, "I would be alone," he continued, taking some papers from his bosom, and scanning them with an attentive eye. "The night is drawing to the third watch, and ere that hour I have much to do."

The guilty man looked not on his wife as she withdrew. Could he have seen the smile that vainly strove with the rising tear, the heart that had forgotten its better nature, might even then have been reclaimed by the hand of love, and once more owned his sway.

CHAPTER IX.

THE REFUSAL.

● ELATED with the success which had hitherto marked his plans, and the silence in which his guilt had slumbered, Sejanus resolved to push ambition one step further, and openly claim from the Emperor his widowed daughter, whose hand he hoped would link his destinies with empire.—To this step he was urged, not more by his own ambitious visions than the importunity of the unhappy woman, who vainly sought in change of condition a change of mind. It was the custom (introduced by Julius Cæsar) that all application to the emperor, even in case of a personal interview, should be made in writing. The purport of the memorial was as follows:—

“That the munificence he had experienced from his prince produced such indelible gratitude, he was now accustomed no longer to offer vows to the gods, but prayers to Cæsar. The distinctions of rank and the power of wealth had never been to him objects of ambition ; but that he rather sought the post of danger, where his fidelity and courage might be shown in guarding the life of his prince. The emperor had already shown a proud mark of favor to his friend in proposing an alliance between his (Sejanus’) daughter and the son of his nephew, Claudius. His daughter Livia was now a widow, and he trusted that, should a second union be proposed for her, his prince would graciously think of one who never could forget his various benefits, and whose life and services would ever, as they had been, be devoted to his throne.”

Tacitus, in this passage, is silent as to the gross inconsistency of this application, when Sejanus was already a husband and a father.

The answer of Tiberius to this unblushing request was, in perfect consistency with his character, dark and dissembling. The general purport was a refusal based upon different considerations: “It was for Livia herself,” he said, “to determine as to the propriety of a second matrimonial alliance. Do you imagine,” he continued, “that the daughter and widow of a prince would condescend to waste her life in the embraces of a Roman *knight*? For myself, my friendship is without disguise. There are still other ties by which I could bind you to me in closer union.”

From this time Sejanus relinquished all thoughts of imperial alliance, and became less frequent in his visits to his miserable accomplice. Ambition, however, is not disheartened by obstacle ;—difficulty stimulates it in its lofty ascent ; and conquest reanimates exertion by the development of fresh resources.—Like the eagle, it gathers fresh strength from the height it has attained, and the lowliness of the world at its feet lends power to its wing. and ardor to its flight.

There was yet one stratagem left to the favorite whose success would realize his most ambitious hopes, and eventually, perhaps, insure him the reins of sovereignty. To the attainment of this project he turned all the ingenuity of his mind—the plausibility of argument, and his characteristic art. He resolved to persuade Tiberius to depart from Rome, and in the repose of rural retirements to seek a respite from the arduous avocations of empire. The Emperor, he knew, was rapidly advancing in years, and he doubted not that the pleasure he derived from an exemption from the cares of government, would insure his ultimate abdication, and the unconditional surrender of the power he had so long sought.

The constant importunity of the favorite, and the necessity of relief and rest which he urged as a pretext for retirement, wrought at length upon the unsuspecting Tiberius, in whose absence power was delegated to the wily and ambitious minister.

CHAPTER X.

THE LETTER.

THE arts which had advised the retirement of Tiberius did not slumber during his absence. With every day increased the inveteracy of Sejanus against the widow and her orphans, upon whose destruction alone, since the refusal of Livia's hand, rested his hopes of advancement. Spies and informers were placed around the family of Germanicus for the purpose of misconstruing even their private conversations to the favorite, who did not hesitate to magnify them through the aid of ingenuity and falsehood in his private correspondence with Tiberius. Nor was the hostility of Sejanus confined exclusively to Agrippina and her children. Men were seized in the open

day, and dragged insultingly through the streets to execution by the creatures of Sejanus, for no other reason than their bold and fearless attachment to the family of the departed soldier.—One even at the gasp of death foretold the fatality of Sejanus' power, exclaiming, "With victims like myself Sejanus must be glutted." A general shudder as of some approaching calamity pervaded all classes. Men met in silence to part in terror—each suspected the other, so diseased was society with the base system of informers—they feared to speak, lest the Gemoniæ, the hook, and the Tiber might be their fate; but had they spoken, the suppressed sentiments of thousands would have burst in execration upon the devoted head of him who was making Rome a prison, and society a pestilence.

At length fear gave way to indignation upon the intelligence that a letter had been transmitted from Tiberius to the Senate, declaring Agrippina and her sons public enemies. Bearing aloft the images of the matron and her children, they hurried tumultuously to the Senate-house.

"The sons of Germanicus," cried one, "are the sons of Rome; the children of the land their sire has defended."

"Aye," exclaimed another, "there is some foul doing here. Disgrace be on Rome if we allow this insult to his widow."

"What have they done," continued a third, "to deserve this? It is the hand of an enemy hath done it. Rome shall this day avenge the soldier's memory."

Hurrying forward, they surrounded the Senate-house, where the Fathers in full assembly debated upon the letter with doubt and vacillation.

While the destinies of the widow and the orphan hung thus in the balance of the public mind, Agrippina and her children remained within the palace in momentary expectation of the decree which should wrest from her husband's memory its hereditary honor, and brand his wife and children as public enemies. Sejanus, for the purpose of more effectually entrapping his prey, expressed sympathy in her behalf, and with

friendly solicitude went so far as to promise the exertion of his interest with the Senate. The day had been already exhausted in the debate, and the evening was far advanced,—still no intelligence had arrived as to the manner in which the letter had been received, or the probable issue of the vote upon it. Agrippina, with a mental strength undaunted by the mal-
evolence which prompted this last blow to crush her family, remained composedly in her chamber;—she sate in silence by the side of her sons, exchanging with them but few words, while the painful sternness which contracted her brow sufficiently indicated the depth of the feelings she controlled.

“Hark! a step,” she cried; “’tis he.—Now may the gods, my sons, protect us!” She rose from her seat, and advancing a few steps, with folded arms, awaited the expected friend. “Good news or bad?” she said calmly as Sejanus entered. “Let it be one word.” “Bad,” replied the minister after a pause, during which his eyes fell keenly on the princes; “the Fathers have debated long and warmly, the vote is passed, and the offspring of Germanicus condemned.” “Now could I die!” ejaculated Agrippina, raising her hands to heaven, and with difficulty stifling the tears which rose in spite of pride and resolution; “now could I die indeed,—honor is forgotten among men—virtue hath left the Senate;—ungrateful Rome hath insulted the manes of Germanicus, and turned his sword against the breasts of his orphans. Rome! Rome!—not for myself but thee I weep.” “We will not leave thee, mother,” said the princes kneeling, while their tears fell quickly on the hands they pressed to their lips; “we will die with thee—for thee!” “Time wanes,” said Sejanus; “Rome owes a debt to the blood of Germanicus—his children should be her princes, not her enemies.—The night is advancing, and its darkness favors the good will of thy servant,” he continued, addressing Agrippina. “Entrust thy sons to me. In the gloom of night pursuit would be difficult and apprehension impossible. Should my purpose fail, blame not him, who, for its execution recked not to hazard life.”

While Sejanus was yet speaking, the eyes of Agrippina remained sternly fixed upon the ground, and her countenance assumed that rigid, tearless composure which, for the moment, conquers grief only to adorn its triumph afterwards, and follow as its slave. She presented that utter desolation and hopelessness which the sculptor gives to Niobè, when the orphanage of the mother's heart has severed the last tie which bound her to life.

"Flight!" she said, slowly raising her eyes, and fixing them on Sejanus. "Is flight or chains the reward Rome offers to her protector? Must the descendants of Augustus seek such safety, more ignominious than death itself, and fly from the soil consecrated by the ashes of their sire?" Her native sternness and ancestral pride, for the moment, gave way to the mother's tenderness, and bending on their necks, the proud Agrippina wept. "The time is passing," interposed Sejanus. "One moment yet," exclaimed the matron passionately, clasping her sons fervently to her breast; "one moment for the last look—one brief moment for the parting tear even though the heart break with its strong load of grief. Farewell—farewell, my sons!" she said at length, after a pause, resuming her lofty composure. "Be it in the field, amid the terrors of death, or gloom of the dungeon, still remember the blood of Germanicus warms your veins, and the arms of Agrippina clasped ye in infancy. Farewell—the gods look down on ye!"

One hasty and passionate embrace, and the princes followed the minister from the chamber.

On entering the court below, a small body of men presented itself to view. The array in which they stood, and the light from the torches they bore, flashed back by their glittering spears, at once announced them to the princes as a band of prætorians. The stern fixedness of the men, and their appearance at the palace, (when Sejanus had established the camp without the city,) fell on the hearts of the young princes with the force of omen and approaching misfortune.

"Whither wilt thou lead us?" they said simultaneously. "Follow me, and quickly too," rejoined the minister, as he hastened forward to the troops.

They were now within a few paces, when the band, making a slight opening, advanced, and enclosed the princes. Two of the soldiers bearing chains quickly fettered them, as they stood passive and unresisting, rooted with despair and surprise to the spot which had witnessed this treachery. Pointing to the palace, Sejanus led the way, and the soldiers moved on, enclosing the prisoners bound.

They at length approached a remote section of the palace, and descended a few steps. One of the soldiers unlocked the door, whose harsh and grating sound as it echoed through the vault bespoke the dismal and desolate nature of the place. As the brothers looked aghast at the hideous abode which awaited them, and saw the flickering torch almost struggling for existence amid the chill vapor which surrounded it, they exchanged a look of silent horror, and fell on each other's neck. That short embrace pictured to them as in a dream the wild and speechless horrors of a living tomb, where day after day would pass in the wasting agonies of famine, and shed not a single ray upon the dark and loathsome vault. How many a day of fruitless hope—how many a night of grim distorted dreams were yet before them! Light, life and day would pass by their dreary home—even like the verdure of the grass and the blossom of the flower that rest unnoticed on the bosom of the dead. The air that now fluttered on their cheek might be the last witness of life they were destined to know, and the cold, clear stars that looked in silence on their pain, the last objects to remind them of nature.

The guards had retired in obedience to the order of their commander, and the princes had been consigned to their dungeon. As Sejanus for a time walked before the prison door ruminating on the success which awaited the removal of his rivals, he stopped suddenly and surveyed the gloomy space

surrounding him. He started, as he felt the sense of that dull and awing silence which mocks the listener, and seems to link his mind with the very depths of the grave.—Midnight was around him—not a whisper broke her “solitary reign,” and even the night-wind seemed to have forgotten its sigh; yet, though he heard nought, a thousand shapes passed him, each bearing in blazoned characters of flame the tale of his ambition and his crimes. He was about to rush from the spot, when the echo of a footstep arrested his ear.—He stopped, and, startled at the silence which followed, was about to resume his flight, when the figure of a man confronted him, and he felt his iron grasp upon his shoulder.

“What would’st thou?” exclaimed Sejanus, too terrified to draw the sword on whose hilt his hand rested. No reply followed. Sejanus, trembled still more as he felt the grasp tightening on his shoulder—“Speak, speak—what wouldst thou?” “Death!” replied the stranger in a deep and broken voice; “the flames of Hades!—Fire alone can wash away the stain!” “Back, madman!” exclaimed Sejanus, struggling in his grasp; “I am now in no mood for fighting.” “Nor I,” rejoined the stranger, unsheathing his sword.—“Life for life—Drusus is unavenged, and the blood of Germanicus cries from yonder vault!” “Demon or Sorcerer! whate’er thou art,” returned Sejanus in horror, “how knowest thou this?” “Life for life!” continued the stranger, standing with his naked sword; “’tis Lygdus speaks!”

Sejanus stood speechless, and trembling as before a spirit risen from the dead for judgment and retribution. The eyes of Lygdus remained sternly fixed upon him, whilst the unsheathed sword announced his deadly purpose. The spell of power and menace had passed from lord to slave, who in turn used the lash which had once made him tremble. Pale, inert, and motionless stood Sejanus—even as the monarch of Israel, when at midnight, and from the lips of the dead he heard that the “glory had departed” from his house—that the diadem was to be taken from his own brow, and placed on that of a stranger.

"Life for life!" continued Lygdus resolutely, approaching still nearer; "I tell thee the manes of Drusus haunt me by day, and groan in my dreams at night.—This to thy heart!"

The extreme peril of a solitary encounter with a madman at the dead of night, and he in the possession of a secret whose disclosure would overturn every project, and dethrone ambition from the height to which it soared, inspired even the coward with a momentary courage. With a violence so unexpected as to disarm his antagonist, he grasped the sword already pointed at his breast, and turned it with force upon Lygdus. A deep groan followed.—The sword fell from the hand of Sejanus.

"Vengeance now for both!" exclaimed Lygdus, as, goaded by the wound, he rushed from the presence of his accomplice

CHAPTER XI.

THE RETURN.

THE elevation of Sejanus in the eyes of Rome, and the flattery which greeted him every where, were now proportioned to the success which had hitherto stamped his designs. His statues were erected in the forum, temples, and even in private houses. The altars smoked with incense, as in honor to divinity, and his birth-day was celebrated with religious rites. The fortunes of Tiberius, in the public mouth, went hand in hand with those of his favorite minister, and at the same time constituted the fashionable oath of the Roman youth. Votes passed the Senate in his favor, and the servile multitude, who ever follow in their master's train, lavished upon him the same eulogies and adulation which the bended knee offers to imperial power.

Greatness, like an opium dream, creates delirious and intoxicating fancies ; but the visions participate the extravagance of the excitement. Sejanus in imagination, (now that his rivals were removed, and the blood of Germanicus was doomed to the vault and chain,) grasped the sceptre, and wore the purple of the Cæsars. Sovereignty trembled from the infirmity of the hand which held it, and chance presented no rival to prevent its delegation to himself. Ambition was well nigh exhausted in her ascent, and could now pause with security to review the arduous path she had trodden, and the difficulties she had conquered ; still to insure ultimate success, the observance of his usual art, and the adoption of caution were necessary. In his correspondence with Tiberius, he addressed him as a man who acknowledged no other motives save the honor of his sovereign, the safety of his person, and the stability of his throne.

But the dark and enigmatical nature of Tiberius fully counterbalanced any fraud or dissimulation his minister might adopt towards him. At the very moment that he pointed the public attention to Sejanus as "his best friend" and "faithful minister,"—by whom alone the peace of his Empire was secured, and its glory preserved with lustre, he but employed the same weapons of art, insidiousness, and duplicity which had been wielded so successfully by Sejanus. The enmity he had evinced against Germanicus, which terminated in the murder of that prince, had directed itself with equal bitterness against his widow and children. The pride of disposition and lineage, her attachment to the memory of Germanicus, and the spotless integrity of her character, had not only rendered the matron herself obnoxious, but increased his hostility to her children. The vote which decreed them public enemies, was to him therefore a matter of joy and self-gratulation ; still the solicitude expressed by Sejanus upon this subject, and the persecutions he had unrelentingly fostered, awakened suspicions within the bosom of Tiberius as to the loyalty of his favorite, and the

purity of his motives. "In his hostility against that family was he animated by attachment to his prince, or the selfish suggestions of his own welfare? Did he mean to gratify the enmity of his master or his own?" were questions which the suspicions of Tiberius rendered constant and perplexing, and determined him in favor of a private return to his capital.

CHAPTER XII.

THE LAST MEETING.

"THE Emperor is in Rome," said Sejanus, his voice and manner agitated, as he abruptly entered the apartment of Livia on the evening of Tiberius' return; "he has returned in private, and keeps himself recluse from all.—Orders have been issued for his privacy—not even *I* can speak with him,—our marriage rites have been denied,—some foul spell lies upon us." "Oh! say not so, my lord," returned Livia earnestly, as though guilt sought support in the hour of trial from him who shared her crimsoned secret; "the spell that dooms thee falls on me also with equal force. Remember," she continued, lowering her voice, "that guilty night I vowed me thine by the bed of death, and amid the terrors of life's parting hour. Bound by the hand of guilt, what force can sever us save that which made us one in crime and passion?" "By the gods! thou talkest, my girl," exclaimed Sejanus, freeing himself from her embrace, "as one to whom her love had been an hour of joys and smiles; art thou so wrapt in these gilded dreams of passion as to overlook the clouds, whose gathering gloom will shut them out forever? See'st thou not a deep and dark abyss before thee? The emperor returned! and I, Sejanus, whose statues have divided homage with him—for whom altars have blazed,—I, his minister, shut from his pre-

sence! Is this, then, an hour to talk of love? Nay, rather of despair." "Then," exclaimed the wretched woman, clasping her hands, and falling on her knees, "if the vow be despair, I make it here, even in the presence of those Powers who have witnessed our guilt, and will avenge it—who have heard our passion, and can curse it for our ruin. Ye gods! in this last and fatal hour, look down on us both bound by despair and guilt—stained with an husband's blood and with unholy passion—what now is left the murderess save the weight of your vengeance? Let fall your lightnings even where we stand, but save, oh save me from the haunting shade of Drusus! "Come, kneel with me," she continued, bending on Sejanus—an expression that made him tremble for the fearful consummation of her prayer; "kneel with me; thou hast poisoned ere now mine ear and soul with guilt; dost thou, then, fear to finish the ghastly work by calling down the vengeance we deserve.—Kneel, kneel with me," she cried, starting to her feet as she beheld Sejanus fixed to the spot with horror, and seizing his arm, "kneel with me, traitress and murderess as I am; but one end awaits us, death—but one doom, vengeance!"

The wild and frantic gesture which accompanied the imprecation, realised to Sejanus the fullness of its terrors and denunciations. He recoiled from her as she grasped his arm, and shuddered at the glance of those eyes which, fixed on him flashing and dilated, seemed to reflect the lightnings she had invoked in judgment on their heads. He trembled, as her wild and impassioned mien brought before him the Sybil in her impassioned moments of prophecy.

"Off, off," he cried with terror, disengaging his arm. "Thy madness will betray us both—thy ravings will carry our tale of guilt even to the chamber of Tiberius." "Let that dark hour come," rejoined Livia, unawed by the apprehension of discovery; "no thicker gloom can follow it than that which flung its shade upon us when first we met. Oh, that we had never met! In that fell hour guilt burst the chain that bound

her, and walked in freedom to tempt and curse us.—In that dread hour Nature slumbered at her post, and left her ties to be rent by the hands of kindred, and her blood to stain them.—In that dread hour light itself became extinguished for the darkness and tempest that swept the heaven and the earth—kneel with me then, and pray for death: for what avails life to those shunned by man and by the gods accurst?” “Woman! art mad? would'st brave thy fate? would'st seek thine own destruction?” rejoined Sejanus, bewildered and horror-stricken. “I would do aught,” replied the miserable woman, “to free me from the pangs which gain strength from every hour of my life. Oh! leave me not, Sejanus,” she continued, observing him about to leave the apartment, and extending her hands in the agony of prayer and the strength of her own fears, “leave me not alone.—His image stands by my side—every object around me is quick with his voice. Leave me not alone,” she said, her voice subsiding to a tone of menace, “or by the gods avengers! my shade shall stand by thy side in thy last and fearful hour!”

Fear and horror closed the ear of the guilty man against the curse of his accomplice, as he hurried from the chamber. The rites of their unhallowed love had been solemnized in the hour of death, and remorse now called down imprecation to rest upon them.

As Sejanus was standing abstractedly on the stair, an attendant from the Emperor bore a message for his immediate presence.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE DISCLOSURE.

THE occasion which demanded the presence of Sejanus was a private interview between Tiberius and his niece Agrippina. Unbowed by the last fatal blow which cut off the hopes of empire she had cherished for her sons, by declaring them public enemies, the Roman matron stood before the Emperor. Her beautiful and correct outline of feature had derived a rigid firmness from acquaintance with grief; but the pride and majesty of its expression remained unsubdued beneath the visitation of wrong and suffering.

"Blame me not, my Lord," she said, in reply to some previous observation from Tiberius. "A mother's love is the warmest throb that Nature gives the heart. Denounced by their country, by the orders of their prince and kinsman! Regarded by all as enemies to the soil their sire defended, and they were born to rule. What was left to the mother, in that dark hour which menaced the lives and honors of her children, but to consult their safety by flight, when they could not demand protection. Thou hast lost a son thyself—thou can'st then best judge a parent's feelings." "No more—no more of that," said Tiberius impatiently, starting from the momentary fit of abstraction into which he had fallen. "'Tis not of my son I ask thee. Him will the gods in time avenge. 'Tis of thee and thy sons I would enquire. 'Tis true by my orders they were voted enemies to the throne and state; but —." He suddenly checked himself. "Thou hast not seen him since?" "Not," replied the matron, "since the Fathers pronounced their doom. He told me he could preserve them amid the storm which threatened us, and to him I resigned them." "Fool—fool!" muttered Tiberius, in tones of self reproach, pacing the chamber with impatience. "Fool! thus to be the tool of art—thus to have mine ear charmed, and my senses dulled by every note a deceitful

syren may breathe there. Fool! He shall find art itself can be deceived, and the towerings of ambition overreached. He shall yet know, it is not the olive alone which wreathes the sceptre; serpents may sometimes coil it. Fool! fool! thus to be deceived."

Lost in the fervor of his own thoughts, and the meditations of revenge, he walked impatiently to and fro, uttering sentences incoherently, and apparently unconscious of Agrippina's presence—

"You know then nought of my sons?" enquired Agrippina, endeavoring to restore the current of his mind to their former theme. "Who?—I!" retorted Tiberius. "Am I—a murderer!" he said after a pause, the livid hæ of his countenance almost verifying the imputation he sought to avoid. "Then," replied Agrippina, with dignity, "it is the part of Cæsar to seek and punish those—who, under the guise of protection, may have sought to shed Rome's noblest blood. I charge thee, by thy throne, and by the gods, whose care is for its safety, not to leave unpunished that bold ambitious man, who dared to base his own hopes upon the destruction of thy brother's line! The memory of Germanicus still lives in every heart. Let not the voice of the sire be heard from his tomb, calling for vengeance on the murderer of his offspring!"

Silence followed, which Tiberius seemed unwilling to break, conscious of the part he had taken in the condemnation of his kinsmen, and fearful of exasperating the haughty spirit of Agrippina. It was, however, soon interrupted by the entrance of Sejanus.

The minister was about advancing to pay obeisance to Tiberius, when the cold reserved demeanor of the latter, and the regard of anger, blended with irony, which he cast on him, produced hesitation. His eyes passed quickly from Tiberius to Agrippina, in whose expression he almost read the discovery of his designs. Unwilling to advance, and fearful to speak, he stood with doubt and embarrassment before them,

as before those who had read his inmost soul, and were empowered to punish its foul and treacherous crimes.

"Speak—speak! my lord," at length he said, preferring even condemnation to the suspense of silence. "Speak! Wherefore this silence, or the displeasure it would manifest? In thine absence hath not all been well? The peace of thy capital preserved, and the honor of thy throne maintained?" No reply followed, and the guilty man, as his eyes wandered in perplexity from one to the other, read in their determined silence the downfall of his power, and the fiat of his fate. "Speak! my lord," he repeated urgently, "this silence hath not been thy wont toward me." "Rather speak—thou!" retorted Tiberius, with violence, forgetting his wonted apathy in the contemplation of a wretch, whose hypocrisy formed but another link in the chain of his arts. "Rather speak thou, who, as Consul in my absence, must well know the crimes that have defiled the capital thou wert left to govern, and undermined the throne it hath been thy vaunt to support. Rather speak thou, devastator of Rome, and assassin of her princes! Speak—I say—and quickly for many moments may not be that thou can'st call thine own." "Give the mother back her children," said Agrippina, in a deep and determined tone, that smote upon the heart of the guilty man. "Give back the fatherless to the widow, and Rome her princes."

A spell that seemed to bind down utterance and motion, paralysing thought and feeling, and weighing him down to the earth, with the power of death itself, its very chill at his heart, and its palor on his brow, sank upon Sejanus. He endeavored to raise his hands for mercy—they dropped nerveless and inanimate at his side—he strove to speak—his lip felt like flame, and his throat was parched and dry—his brain grew dizzy—every object flew passed him, forming a dim, confused and turbid stream—a thousand voices appealing for mercy rose from the drifting fragments of the wrecks that strewed the water.—But clearer, and above all, ere he sank forever, amid the ghastly

struggles of death, rose the voice of Drusus in execration upon his murderer, devoting him to the infernal gods.

"Speak, traitor," said Tiberius, looking on him with disdain, "Where is my son?—Where the children of Germanicus?"

Sejanus could not speak—his head sank upon his bosom, and he fell upon his knees. The emperor stamped with violence upon the floor—the sound of chains, and the motion of armed men were heard. The door of the adjoining chamber was opened; and a small band of prætorians, headed by an officer, entered, surrounding a man heavily fettered.

"Advance," cried Tiberius, indicating a certain position to the prisoner next to Sejanus—the band fell back, leaving him free egress—the man slowly advanced, and cast a proud and triumphant look on the prostrate Sejanus. The latter, hearing the clanking of the fetters, raised his eyes slowly, and as he recognized in the prisoner, Lygdus, he trembled not more at his expression of defiance and malignity, than the wild and abandoned appearance he presented.* His beard had grown long and neglected, and his hair, matted and disordered, fell so as almost to reach his shoulders. His arms were folded on his breast, and as he glanced quickly from Sejanus to Tiberius, his whole demeanor wore that air of desolate pride, the more revolting from the crimes it is meant to conceal, and the punishment it is doomed to undergo.

"Rise murderer," said Tiberius, after a pause, looking on Sejanus with a smile of bitter disdain, in which was mingled the anguish of the Father. "Rise—thou who has not feared the curse of the gods or the parting groan of life!—How fearest thou the gaze of thine accomplice? Rise—traitor!—murderer!"

"Mercy—mercy," groaned the wretched man, still groveling at his feet, and fearful to rise amid the host of living witnesses whom fear and conscience multiplied.

"Rise—coward, I say," reiterated Tiberius, stamping once

* The Romans allowed their hair and beard to grow while under the influence of grief. The contrary custom was adopted by the Greeks upon a similar occasion.

again with violent passion, "and confront these thine accusers."

With difficulty Sejanus obeyed the command and rose from the ground; but as he met the furious glance of Tiberius, the wild, haggard, and frenzied expression of Lygdus, and the milder, though stern look of Agrippina, which seemed to plead even more strongly than words for the restoration of her children; Sejanus recoiled, clasping his hands violently to his eyes, as though in each he recognized a witness.

"Ha! ha! thou art not as mad as I," exclaimed Lygdus, raising his arms, the clanking of his chains, the while, lending a dismal echo to his distracted laugh. "Not mad as I—I tell thee," he continued, approaching Sejanus, and grasping his arm, his face assuming a hideous contortion. "That pale body hath haunted me by day, and made the world around it one wide and yawning grave—I have fled to the mountain, like the bird the shaft is winged for; even on its solitary top hath that pale and dismal shroud moved silently and haunted me from crag and pinnacle—on the river's brink I have stood, resolved within its waters to wash away the stain I bore since that foul night: but ever as I gazed upon its glassy face, that pale, cold form stood by my side, and seemed to shed a deep and deadly calm upon the wave. Even amid the gay and bustling throng of crowded Rome I've moved, and strove amid the mirth, and shout, and jest, to banish from my thought that foul spectre, which made each living face I gazed on the wan reflection of its own, and changed the merry ring of human voices to the dull, deep silence of its own dark home—Fool! thou'rt not as mad as I—Oh! that the gods had doomed me dead, not mad! Nay, shudder not—away with these fears. Thou did'st not fear to make me what I am; why then should'st tremble to look upon thy work?"

He removed the hands of Sejanus from his eyes, and master and slave in the work of death, started as they looked upon each other.

"He hath told me all," at length said Tiberius, calmly; "and though distraught with the crimes thou hast driven him to hath disclosed the bold ambition that dared to single a Cæsar's son for his victim, his wife for his mistress, and his own palace for his grave—Fool!" continued Tiberius, his manner deriving additional warmth from indignation, "did'st think that because thine arts have hitherto flung a veil upon the act, that there yet was no retribution for the murderer, no hand among gods or men to rend it from the corse, and show to Rome her murdered prince? Why do I speak?—Why do I trifle time?—Where are the children of Germanicus?"

"Where?" iterated Lygdus, in a tone that revived to Sejanus his last interview with the slave. "Where?—Hath ambition distilled her second draught for *them*?"

"Not so—not so," gasped Sejanus, bending beneath the accumulation of charge and reviling, and trembling now before the slave he had once commanded; "not so—the children of Germanicus still live."

"Where?—Where?" again cried Lygdus, clasping his hands in a transport of violence, and fixing on Sejanus a keen and searching glance, as though justice herself stood face to face to, and interrogated guilt." "Where?—speak—Here?" he continued, rending open his garments and exposing a gash upon his breast; "here is the witness of thy treachery to the widow and the orphan—ha!" observing, with a malignant smile, the effect produced by his words on the visage of Sejanus.—"Thou dost not forget our fearful meeting, at the dead of night, by the prison of the princes, where, as thou thoughtest, no witnesses save the mute stars looked down upon thee? Hast thou forgotten? Fool to ask! Guilt works upon thy lip and furrows thy pale brow—my parting word that night was—"Vengeance." Have I not kept that pledge? *Thou* hast blasted virtue; *I* have betrayed crime."

"My lord, I crave thy promised justice," cried Agrippina, sinking at the feet of Tiberius, her countenance wearing an

expression of mingled emotion and horror; "justice on the assassin of thy son, and the tyrant of thy kinsmen—hear my prayer, humbled and bending at thy knee—redeem thy pledge—condemn the guilty—save the innocent!"—

Tiberius heard not the agonized prayer of the mother, as she knelt at his feet. His eyes were still fixed upon Sejanus, and round the form of that fallen man there seemed to hover a spell of power and wonder that endowed even the hour of downfall with pride. Still fixedly regarding him, he said—

"I have at length unveiled thee, traitor—not love for Cæsar, but fear for thine own advancement, made me "*beware the blood of Germanicus!*" The caution were better directed against thyself, than the sons of the warrior. Speak, wretch! Was't thou did'st forge these suspicions?"

"Ask me no more," cried Sejanus, extending his locked and fevered hands, in terror to Tiberius; "ask me no more—the vengeance of the gods is on me—it peals in every word—it blinds me like the lightning—ask me no more—give me the fetter and the dungeon—let me no longer walk among men, the fallen—the despised—the outcast—a warning and a jest. Let vengeance fall on me alone, but spare thy daughter."

"'Tis a vain prayer," rejoined Tiberius, calmly, "the life thou askest the gods already claim for justice and her sacrifice—Livia is dying even now—madness poisons her last moments, and every word she utters breathes a curse upon thy name."

A violent shudder ran through the murderer's frame, as he saw, in the death of his accomplice, one more blot upon the register of guilt; one more victim bound to her blood-stained altar.

"Macro," said Tiberius, turning to the officer who headed the troop. "Have thou command over the prætorians?—He who is disloyal to the throne, may be found a traitor in the camp. Unbind the slave, and load the murderer with his chains."

"Ye may free my hands," cried Lygdus, as the soldiers

obeyed the orders of Tiberius, "but my soul is bound in chains man can never loose."

"To the prison with him," said Tiberius, and having exchanged some further words with Macro in private, Sejanus left the apartment in chains, guarded by the soldiers.

CHAPTER XIV.

THE DIE TURNS.

DRUSUS and Nero were still in prison. The persecution of Sejanus had added cruelty to injustice, and being condemned to suffer in privation, misery, and silence, human intercourse had been suspended by the orders of the minister. The vote which had been passed against them, silenced men as to the justice of their doom, who thought Sejanus was acting by the sanction of Tiberius, while the absence of the Emperor from Rome at the period of their incarceration, cut off the last hope the young princes had entertained for their freedom.

So passed on day after day, in the drear and companionless solitude of the dungeon. The bitter fellowship of tears was the only link that bound them in that desolate home. Each shrank from the vain task of speaking accents of hope to the other, when he turned to his own heart, and felt the chilling answer was—despair! Nor day nor night brought change to the deep silence of the place, save when the captive walked his gloomy cell, and his fetters sent their shrill echo through its depths.—By the pale and stinted light which, through the grating, sent its mockery of day, they shuddered to look upon each other, as men who see the spectral hand of death in the pining form, the glassy eye, and the wasted hand. Famine walked by their side, and death seemed the tenant of the place. They knew not day, save for the wan and sickly light it flung on horror and desola-

tion, but longed for night to throw her shade on misery, and seal up their eyes in darkness.

It was midnight ere that sad procession reached the prison. Slowly it moved through the now empty space before the palace, the torches borne by the soldiers flinging a pale, and uncertain light on the bent and fettered form of Sejanus. In silence they advanced, as though death were their task, and the armed soldiers his ministers. No word passed from comrade to comrade, and the only sound that broke the monotonous silence of the hour, issued from the prisoner's chains, as in the agony of shame, and the humility of prostrate pride, he would impatiently raise his hands, and invoke the gods for death.

As they approached the prison, Lygdus pointed to the miserable cell which confined the princes. The soldiers halted, and one descending, unlocked the door. Sejanus stood rooted to the spot, as his eyes involuntarily rested upon its dark and tomb-like depths. It seemed to yawn upon him like a grave, which held the mysterious secret of his guilt, and revealed to the gaze of man the tale of blood, of which earth groaned to disburthen herself. A wild cry of joy burst from the cell, and woke the murderer from his dream. In that cry life seemed to break from her trance, and nature once again to weave those ties, which darkness and the fear of death had broken.

"Let me not look on them," exclaimed Sejanus, averting his face, and covering it with his hands. "I cannot bear their eyes—they sear—they blast me. Fallen! Fallen! Oh, ye gods!" he continued, his piercing and agonised voice sending its echo through the open vault, "flash your lightnings where I stand! Let the vengeance of Heaven outspeed the malice of man, or the gnawing pangs of the dungeon!"

A shout of welcome and loyal devotion, blended with expressions of pity from the soldiers, rent the air, as they beheld the sons of their beloved commander emerging from the prison;—their young and noble forms bowed with chains, and the infirmities of long confinement. Their sire, his battles, and his

valor, were once more the theme of the soldiers' tongue, as crowding round the princes, and sinking at their feet, they poured forth their heartfelt homage, and loved to trace in the lineaments of the sons, the cherished memory of their departed sire.

"To the dungeon with the murderer!" cried some—and the cry simultaneously burst from all, as with rude and desperate hands they seized the fallen favorite, whose vengeance, from the demise of power, they no longer feared.

That night Sejanus rested amid the terrors and the darkness he had doomed to others. That long and sleepless night, whose dreary hours crept on in bitterness, execration, and self-reproach.

The liberated princes returned to the palace, amid the shouts and acclamations of the loyal prætorians.

CHAPTER XV.

THE DUNGEON.

"NAY, why art thou here?" said the prisoner, as he turned impatiently from Apicata, and, as conscious of his own pollution, shrank from her embrace. "Have I asked this of thee, to come and look upon me chained like one whose hour is appointed? - Prythee, tell me not now of love, for mine hath been unhappy and accurst." "Had'st thou made thy wife," rejoined Apicata, her voice struggling with the bitterness of tears, "the truster of this foul secret, the unholy love thou speak'st of had not now a single pang for thee. But I will not chide thee now," she continued, clasping to her breast her degraded husband, while a smile faintly strove with her wild expression of grief. "Think not, in this last and dismal hour, which parts our love forever, making me lone and widowed, and this, thy child, fatherless—think not, though the gods desert, and man frowns

on thee, that the same fate which makes the cold and senseless world thine enemy, can chill the heart of wife or child to thee. Nay, turn not from me—we will not part—they dare not—” “Dare not !” retorted Sejanus, “What dares not the torrent when ruled by the tempest? What dares not the lightning when cloud meets cloud? But why—why,” he added, “linger out the agony of our parting moments? Better the bolt should fall upon its victim, than hover on in silence and in vengeance.” “I came not here,” replied Apicata, clinging to him with that ardor which seemed to omen a last embrace, and mock the hopes she strove to lend—“I came not here to listen to despair—to add weight to the fetters which encompass thee, or gloom to the dungeon which cuts thee off from life and joy. I came to speak of hope, of pardon, and of freedom. Cæsar hath been ever gracious to thee—can he turn in silence from the prayers of mother and child?” “No more—no more ;—no wife—no child,” cried the wretched man, subdued to tears, the associations of home kindling once again the embers of expiring nature, and softening the obduracy of guilt—“No wife—no child,” he continued, clasping his hands to his eyes, as though to exclude the objects which reminded him of honor, happiness, and innocence—“They are here—here, amid the terrors which surround, and the dangers which await thee,” exclaimed Apicata, weeping on the hand she pressed in her’s ; “kneel—kneel with me, my child,” she added, addressing her young daughter, whose tears gave strength to the appeal of the kneeling mother—“look on us at thy feet—look on and bless us. We will not part from thee, though man should doom, and death claim thee. The hand that lights thy pile, shall build one even for us.”

As Apicata and her child knelt before him in their attitude of prayer and grief, the wretched man endeavored to conquer those recollections of home and happier hours, awakened by their presence—ashamed to shew the feelings he could not subdue, he started impatiently from the spot, and walked to the

remote end of the cell. The struggle was vain. Though power and ambition had alienated him from the ties and feelings of home, and obstructed the stream of nature, poisoning her waters, and checking her impulses, yet the terrible summons of the last hour, and the warning voice of death, which sent its hollow echo through the dungeon, awoke once again within the heart, the father and the husband. He turned, and clasping his child to his bosom, wept upon it. It was long since that heart had known a single throb of nature; yet, in the hour of parting and of death, she returned to weep amid the waste she left a paradise.

"My child—my child," he said, kissing it tenderly, his voice feeble and broken; "pardon that I have forgotten thee—have passed in heedlessness those happier hours, when I might have caught thy smile, and treasured it as a beam upon my path—when I might have heard thy voice of gladness, and deemed it some sweet strain to charm me from ill, and guide me on to good. Thy tears—thy tears, my child—they come too late.—Wretch that I am! The child weeps upon the sire!—The gods—the gods, my child, preserve and guard thee ever!"

The last pulse of nature had scarcely died in that sad embrace, when a wild and furious shout, which resembled more the roar of distant waters than the union of human voices, broke on the ear of the wretched pair. To the murderer, it bore the omen of judgment. He clasped his child with a convulsive energy to his heart—he wept once more upon it—and once more mingled blessings with his tears. Apicata still hung upon his neck, trembling as those fearful sounds rose and died in the distance. As they approached, the name "*Sejanus*," uttered with savage execration, by thousands that seemed to have but one word to speak, reached them with an appalling distinctness. The unhappy groupe clung still more closely together, as though nature rallied her energies to meet the fearful hour which was to destroy and paralyse them. The tempest had slumbered but for a moment, only to renew its strength. Again it rose, the

tones more wild, and the curses more bitter, as proximity gave them additional power—"Sejanus to the Gemoniæ ! The Tiber ! To death with the murderer !" Such were the fearful expressions which reached the cell from that yelling ocean of human beings, as they moved onward to the prison from the Temple* of Concord, where the Senate had met and condemned Sejanus; the mighty mass animated by the one murderous cry, and bound by the one iron chain—Vengeance !

In the pauses of that fearful yell, not a word had passed between wife and husband. Sejanus' eyes were fixed upon the open space before the dungeon. Flight could not preserve him, his pursuers were even now at his prison door. As the shouting rose more strongly, he endeavored to move from the spot, for the purpose of concealing himself in some remote corner of the cell. He could not stir. Unconsciously he bore the helpless form of Apicata, who had swooned in his arms, and his child still clung to him, embittering his agonies with its tears and lamentations.

Still rapidly came on the fierce and disordered mass, and louder rose upon his affrighted ear the cries of the many-mouthed monster for vengeance. More fervently in that moment of despair he clasped the fainting form to his breast, and felt even the pulseless, inert burthen link him more strongly to hope. Savage and merciless though the crowd might be, could it while the ties of nature thus coiled around him—wife and child speechless in his embrace—cry aloud for his blood, and wreak its vengeance ?

While the miserable man thus clung to a shattered raft amid the waste which swam before, and the storm which pealed around him, the yelling of the mob and imprecations on his name came on still nearer, like waves that gather in the distance, and, bearing on the fragments of the wreck, fling the ghastly offering at our feet. A moment more, and the leaders stood before their victim.

*The Senate met in different temples.

They looked on him, pale and trembling in the embrace of his wife and child, but the sternness that bowed the iron and resolute visage of each, showed that the heart was impervious to the silent appeal of nature. Still on they came, tumultuously; every shout a curse upon his name, every cry, for vengeance. The eyes of Sejanus passed unconsciously from one to the other, as in fierce and impenetrable array they ranged themselves before his dungeon; some armed with clubs, others with swords, as design had provided, or chance flung them in their way. A dim and confused mass floated before his imagination: he could not trace a single feature, nor recognise a single voice, but the dreadful perception weighed upon his mind of one vast body knit together for the same dreadful purpose—death and destruction.

“Away, away with him! the rope! the hook!—the murderer to the Tiber!” burst with a simultaneous discord from the multitude, and, as they shouted, the ghastly instruments of execution were exhibited, and one mighty rush on the moment filled the cell. Sejanus spoke not, stirred not; he stood perfectly motionless, save for a convulsive tremor of the arm as it unconsciously clasped more closely, for the last time, the pledges which life had left him.

Regardless of the protection vouchsafed to him in the presence of wife or child, they grasped him violently and bound him. One shrill cry from the wretched man, as he struggled with his foes, for mercy, woke Apicata from her trance. The child knelt to its father’s enemies, clasped its hands in the speechless terror of childhood, and what it could not ask with words, implored with tears. By its side knelt its mother, her hands clasped to her fevered brain, and the frenzied expression of the eye, denoting the pain and agony of the heart.

“Death! death!” rang on all sides with fearful force, making the dungeon vocal with the terror of its echo, and the demon-fierceness of its instruments. Vain and impotent were the struggles of the wretched man against the overpowering mass

that pressed upon him, each eager in the work of blood, and deeming vengeance alone the expiation for the murdered heir of the Cæsars. In the pauses of their unbridled rage rose the voice of Sejanus for "mercy!" stifled with terror and the exhaustion of physical struggle, like the choked voice of the sinking swimmer amid the momentary slumber of the tempest.

"Mercy? mercy? Ha, ha! Mercy to the murderer? Away with him!" was the infuriated and deriding answer, as almost with one hand, they grasped and tore him from the innocent forms which still clung to him.

"Have ye no mercy? mercy for his wife and child?" cried Apicata, following them on her knees as they tore him from her presence, her hands locked with a convulsive agony, "a wife—a woman, kneels, implores ye as men. Leave not," she continued, clasping her child and presenting it to the multitude, with that passionate and unuttered eloquence of gesture which nature lends the mother in the moment which threatens her offspring; "leave not this child fatherless, she hath not wronged ye. Her tears speak her innocence, and beg in silence for the father."

She spoke to stones, to men hardened by the contemplation of the crimes they came to avenge, and deaf to every sound save the reiterated cry which burst from their own lips—"death! death!"

"The rope! the hook! the Tiber!" rose once more around and above them. The hideous images created by these words inspired Sejanus with a wild and terrific energy, which for the moment baffled even the strength of numbers. He rushed upon his most forward antagonist, and, seizing a club, hewed his way through the pressing crowd. It was vain, however, as the delusive strength which precedes the final throes of life, lending the hope of a moment to the dying; the club was stricken from his hand, and gasping, shrieking, and struggling, he was overpowered and borne down breathless to the earth.

"Guilty ! guilty !" shrieked the doomed man, his smothered voice scarcely rising amid the pressure and the tumult, "still, mercy—mercy—oh ! spare—"

A blow laid him dead at their feet, in the very moment of entreaty ; the rope had been adjusted round his body, and, amid a burst of savage exultation which seemed to anticipate even posthumous revenge, he was dragged from the prison.

Mother and child were now the solitary tenants of that dismal cell. Some moments after they had left the prison, she endeavored to collect her scattered senses ; she looked round wildly ; she could individualize neither object nor place ; time seemed to fly with a speed which bore away the reality of the image, only to leave its horror in the dream ; the dim perception of furious clamor rang in her ear, and the figures of armed men surrounded her in a dense and congregated mass, a frown knit every brow, and sternness compressed every lip ; yet was every thing in that moment confused and impalpable.

Amid this vague and wildering thought, she felt the arms of her little daughter Claudia clasping her neck, she heard her soft and sorrowful voice, as vainly she breathed accents of tenderness and consolation. The voice of her child was a link to the horrors of the scene she had witnessed : with the force of a spell it re-painted the murderous mob, as they pressed around, and trampled to the earth her husband ; she heard her husband's dying shriek ; she saw once again the terrible and convulsive struggle of his last moment. As she dwelt upon the vision, imagination gave it a deeper coloring, and a tangibility more hideous even than sight itself ; she seized her child and rushed from the spot, where she had knelt, and beheld her husband's murder. But nature was faint and sick with the horrors that had curdled her warmest stream, and burst her strongest ties ; she tottered forward a few steps, bearing her child, and sank with it lifeless on the dungeon-floor.

CHAPTER XVI.

FATE BUILDS THE PILE.

CRIME, which had dragged the murderer from his hiding-place, and made his dungeon but a funeral-pile, demanded yet one more victim for her hecatomb. Remorse had planted her thorn on the brow, and left the sense of life but an aching load upon the heart. Dark and desolate the path where conscience walks by our side, flinging her shade on every flower that may deck our path, and mingling her whisper with every breeze that wakes its freshness and odor.

The same day that witnessed the hideous end of Sejanus, looked also on the last moments of his accomplice, Livia. Pale, almost to the semblance of death, she lay upon her couch, her hands clasped upon her bosom, and her disordered hair attesting those violent struggles to which sleep lent but a momentary respite. Yet was it but the image of sleep, even like the calm which moonlight sheds upon the face of the waters, while in their depths the waves roll darkly and turbidly. Quick and fevered the breath which rose from her tintless lip, and the anguished sigh that broke at intervals, seemed like an inward struggle with the dark spirit which ruled her dreams. Anon she would raise her hand shudderingly, as conscience vivified the foul night, and the murder, which darkness could not conceal: and brought once again before her, in horrible distinctness, the chamber, the cup, and that pulseless silence which ever reigns in the hour of murder, as anticipative of the grave to which it hurries its victim. Then followed the death-groan, which peals upon the assassin's ear "trumpet-tongued," bearing to it the fearful echo of his crime, and startling silence from her trance.

By the couch stood Agrippina and Tiberius, the former bending over the guilty dreamer, and the latter listening intently to

the expressions which broke from her at intervals; the natural sternness of his visage softened by the pity we feel at the death-bed of even those who have wronged us.

"How distempered are her dreams," said Tiberius, half-musing, his eyes still fixed upon Livia; "how full of agony her sighs; how quick and broken are her ravings; how horribly they tell the tale of that fatal night! How—! She wakes."

Starting from her recumbent position, parting her scattered hair from her temples, and fixing on Tiberius a gaze of terror—"Where am I? What is he—he who stares on me with those eyes of fire, whose vengeance is unquenchable? He—save me, save me from him sister!"

"Fear not," said Agrippina, trembling in the fearful embrace of the arm which clasped her, her innate sense of virtue recoiling from the guilty object whose last moments she felt she was about to witness, "'tis thy father—"

"No—no father!" interrupted Livia, starting from the arm which supported her. "None to bless my parting hour—none to weep upon my urn! I tell thee he is cold—cold as the corse of him they murdered, who stands now by my side, and with his bony finger beckons me to rest!"

"Oh! horror—horror!" exclaimed Tiberius, starting backward from the couch, as the gesture and voice of the maniac materialized the spectre of her ravings.

"Hark!" said Livia, "was not that a groan? who spoke of horror? Since that dread night horror hath lost her gloom, her pang, her groan, and walks no more to scare the weak or blast the wicked. Oh! 'twas a fearful night, and terrible the deed it witnessed. Hast thou not heard it? Nay, then I'll tell thee: they held the cup to him—they watched his latest struggle—it was—my husband!"

Agrippina, shuddering, with a violent effort disengaged herself from the arm of the maniac, and Livia sank back upon her couch.

"Even when she speaks not," said Tiberius, regarding her

calmly, "the working of the lip betrays the frenzied mind. The hand, too, mark how it grasps the air, as though her dreams placed her on some precipice and hurled her to its abyss!"

"Let us be silent," said Agrippina, her face averted from Livia. "If this be the parting hour, our words will only lend it bitterness and horror—who's there?"

An attendant, entering in haste, presented Tiberius with a paper, bearing the following lines:—

"Macro to Tiberius Cæsar, emperor of Rome. Salutem."

"According to thy commands, and the decree of the Fathers, sentence hath been done upon the traitor. But as we approached the Tiber, a slave, by name Lgydus, rushed amid the crowd, and ere we could prevent him, seized a sword from one of the soldiers, and fell upon it. He standeth without to hear thy will, and prayeth, of thy clemency, admission to thy presence before he dies."

The letter concluded with the usual form, a prayer to the gods for the emperor's safety.

"Admit him," said Tiberius to the attendant.

In a few moments footsteps were heard; slow and heavy, as of men who support a burthen—a short and stifled groan echoed through the chamber as they drew nigh, and Lygdus, bleeding from the self-inflicted wound, and supported by soldiers, entered.

The fainting and exhausted condition of the wretched man, as with pain and difficulty he advanced, gave evidence that the wound was mortal. Thick drops stood on his contracted brow, and his half-parted lips betrayed the expiation the murderer was making in the agony of his last moments.

"What would'st thou?" said Tiberius.

"Death—death," replied Lygdus, in a deep and anguished tone; "I would have death—I reck not how fierce the blow, so that it fall soon—Is there no friendly hand here?" he continued, looking round vacantly and languidly, his voice becoming weaker

and more tremulous ; “ none to speed my parting moment, and end its torture ?—Death—death”—he muttered, as his head sank upon his breast.

“ What would’st thou ?” repeated Tiberius, approached the dying man.

“ I have told thee—all—” he replied faintly, as he sank dead in the arms of the soldiers.

“ That voice ! that voice !” exclaimed Livia, starting from her couch, and rushing to the feet of Tiberius ; “ hath it not told thee all ?—Guilt—shame—agony are our’s.—Vengeance hath descended from the gods—Drusus is ——” She fell prostrate on the floor. Agrippina and Tiberius raised her ; but the spirit had past in the acknowledgment of crime, and the justice of its punishment.



GERMANICUS:

A PASSAGE FROM THE REIGN OF TIBERIUS.

———Oh that man!
If there were deeds of the old virtue left,
They liv'd in him.

———What his gen'als lack'd
In images of pomp, they had supplied
With honorable sorrow—soldiers' sadness—
A kind of silent mourning, such as men,
Who know no tears but from their captives, use,
To show in such great losses.

Ben Jonson.

CHAPTER I.

PISO AND MARTINA.

IN the centre of a circle, described for magical purposes, knelt a woman of large and athletic form, though advanced in years. Her hair, originally deep black, was rapidly yielding in colour to the influence of time, and her features, possessing a bold outline, were becoming still more prominent from the same cause. Her arms were bare, and the gradual retreat of the flesh from the sinew, gave the latter a repulsive relief. Her eyes were intently fixed upon a piece of lead she held to a small fire, on which was inscribed the name of "Germanicus."

The circle, to which we have alluded, was formed partially of human bones, skulls, magic verses—on whose golden letters the fire shed a dim and sickly light—combining va-

rious other incantations, which, according to vulgar opinion, were potent to doom the souls of the living to the infernal gods.

The chamber was enveloped in almost complete darkness, save from the dull and grave-like light, which struggled from the fire whereat sate the hag, and instead of dispelling "darkness," served only to render it "visible." Were it not for the anxious glances cast by the crone from the piece of lead to some object without the circle, a spectator might easily have imagined that she was the *only* tenant of the chamber. At length a dim blue flame hovered round the word "Germanicus," and the name itself faded gradually from the surface of the lead. A loud laugh of triumph woke the silence of the room, as, dashing the lead into the fire, she rose with a rapidity somewhat inconsistent with her apparent years, and extended her shrivelled hand in the direction where stood her companion.

"Speak," cried the voice impatiently, "thy news? hath thine incantation prospered? speak!"

"All goes well," rejoined the hag, a hideous laugh distending her mouth; "even so shall he wither, place and name, from amongst men—he dies!"

"When and how?" interrogated the voice urgently.

"At a propitious time, and by my hand," rejoined the hag, extending her skinny arm, and waving it as she spoke. "Think not, though it be dried and sapless like a blasted tree, that it hath lost the vigor of youth which once lent it nerve firm as thine own; aye, by the gods," she continued, erecting her form to a commanding height, "and as fearless too."

"Thy hand upon his death," returned the voice, the speaker at the same time advancing within the circle.

"Hold!" she exclaimed, with an emphatic gesture which caused the object addressed to retreat a pace, "hold; they who enter here traffic with the Future, and its dread uncertainty. Canst thou," she continued, approaching the circle and raising a human bone, "canst thou do thus? Marrowless, bloodless, dar'st thou touch the ghastly relics of the worms' banquet, and

not feel it chill the very blood at thy core? Fool! 'tis not for such as thou," she added, regarding him with derision, "to tread within this pale where sleep the remnants of the dead, the tools of my unholy spell. I tell thee, though I serve thee now, I doom thee and all who seek my accursed aid; for I am one whom crime, hate, poison, have—no matter—" Her voice became low and indistinct, and tears, like the last workings of nature ere she forever abandons her stronghold, the heart, coursed through the "channels of the cheek," which age and passion had wrought there.

"This is no time," said the voice importunately, "for pastime as this. Thou hast promised me thine aid, in the fulfilment of commands Tiberius himself hath made. When I set out for my government in Syria, his instructions were private and peremptory: 'Piso,' he said, 'we charge thee, snare this our adopted son. Let not his claims to imperial power clash with those of our immediate son, Drusus. His courage and his gentleness are daily confirming the favour he hath already won, by his successes in the field. We give thee Syria, while we appoint him to the provinces beyond the Mediterranean. See the task be done; let not Germanicus return.' On thee, then, hangs my hope."

"And thou shalt not be deceived," rejoined the hag, "look here."

She took from her breast what appeared to be a powder, and flung it into the fire; a bright and vivid flame succeeded, which lent a picturesque effect to the two figures as they intently watched the process, and the crimson light as rapidly declined into a pallid white.

"See'st that?" said Martina, a hideous grin distorting her features, "is not that the colour of the flower which blooms on the cheek of death? Ha! ha! Hast thou e'er seen paler on the bloodless lips, or the cheek whereon death hath printed his icy kiss? Thou hast not; 'tis pale as the hue which tints his breathless sleep. Bodes not *this* evil for thine enemy?"

"Thou hast indeed shown his doom," replied Piso, "and thou hast told me by thine own hand. *Thou* wilt not bear the dagger? how—"

"This," exclaimed the hag, drawing from her bosom a small vial: "even this. There is that within this which pales the bloom upon the cheek, and stagnates the blood within the vein. Which deadens the buoyancy of youth, and gives its vigour the paralysis of age. Wouldst see thy victim dead? His fate is even now within my grasp."

"The report spreads through Antioch," rejoined Piso, "that Germanicus is sick."

"So much the more auspicious for the working of my spells," replied Martina, with a revolting leer. "Death hath already, perhaps, anticipated the mortal blow, and the harvest is ready for the sickle. *This* shall be his medicine."

Her words, and the unnatural expression which accompanied them, combining resolve with malignity, almost made the guilty man pause on the very threshold of his purpose. However, the stake for which he played—imperial favour, and the gratitude of the younger Drusus for the removal of a rival—outweighed all feelings of fear, and the sternness of Martina only the more deeply confirmed the deadliness of his design.

"All is prepared then?" said Piso, slowly withdrawing from the chamber, whose associations inspired him with instinctive horror.

"*All*," rejoined the hag, whose lustrous eyes were still fixed on his figure, as it became indistinctly blended with the surrounding gloom.

CHAPTER II.

THE DEATH-BED.

ERE long the victim lay upon the bed of sickness, which was shortly to witness his final struggles. The warrior, Germanicus, whose military success and fame had so excited the jealousy of Tiberius as to the certainty of his succession, lingered now in the pains of poison and treachery. By the specious pretexts of Tiberius, he had been recalled from the field of his greatness in Germany, and honoured with a triumphal entry into the capital, attended by his prisoners of war and the spoils of the vanquished, and carrying in his chariot five of his children. The scene of splendour was, however, as deceptive as the dissimulation which made it the mask of design and jealousy, and the unhappy prince was delegated to the command of Eastern provinces, subject to the treachery of an instructed enemy.

Yes, languid and feeble beneath the wasting hand of disease, lay the warrior whom the historian has pronounced superior to the conqueror of Darius. He had the courage of Alexander without his rashness, while his character became more elevated from the possession of moderation and temperance ; virtues, to which the Macedonian was a stranger.

Weak and nerveless lay the arm, and hushed to a deep and fevered respiration was that voice, which once lent fire to courage, and animated the timid. The shouting of the host, and the din of the encounter, were now exchanged for that pulseless silence of the death-chamber, which seemed to prepare the parting spirit for the repose of the grave ; and the charge, the flight, the rally, shone through the distempered dreams of the dying man, like gleams of a bright and joyous past, which memory sometimes flings upon our dark and dreary path.

By the warrior's couch knelt two of his children, Caligula and Julia, their tender hands uplifted to the gods for the protec-

tion of their sire, and their tender accents of entreaty obstructed by the tears, which, perhaps for the first time, had dimmed the eye, or moistened the cheek of childhood ; over the sleeping Germanicus bent the form of his heroic wife, Agrippina, who, by her virtues and her pride, attested her lofty lineage, granddaughter of Augustus. She hung intently over him, her beautiful regularity of countenance borrowing a slight severity of expression from the grief which was preying upon her mind ; and, as ashamed that her lofty tone of mind should bend to momentary weakness, she would impatiently fling aside the tear, and conceal it from the dying soldier. As he tossed uneasily upon his couch, a faint murmur of pain sometimes broke from his lips, and the affectionate wife stooping and kissing him, fondly thought that that kiss, as it revived the memory of love and happiness to her, could charm from the dying man the pain which quivered on his lip, and, link by link, detached the brittle chain of life.

"Speak—speak, my love," she said, softly yet earnestly, "speak, say that thou art better?"

Germanicus opened his eyes slowly, and as they languidly passed from the form which bent over him to his kneeling children, tears quickly suffused them, and his words sank inarticulately. At length, with difficulty raising himself on the arm of Agrippina—"Poison, poison," he muttered, "it is too slow for those who wish my death." He paused, and regarding her with a melancholy tenderness—"My wife ! if thus they deal with me what canst thou expect from mine enemies ?—enemies !—I call the gods to witness ! whom I have shunned, yet who haunt me like spectres of my doom—my wife—my children—'tis for *ye* I weep."

"Fear not, my husband," rejoined Agrippina, "'tis the hand of sickness, not hatred, which affects thee thus."

"'Tis here—here—in my very heart I feel it," replied the dying soldier faintly, "oh !" he continued, while a momentary lustre, which seemed to reflect the memories of past deeds and

glory, flashed in his eyes—"oh! that it were the spear of my foe in the battle, that thus rankles in me. Then could I bear it with patience and with pride. But, thus to meet death; thus, in a still and darkened chamber, bending like a coward to the frown the warrior braves with a smile, and writhing under the pain he spurns for the glory which embalms his name in the heart of his country. It is this—this—"

Tears of impatience and excitement fell rapidly, and the warrior, faint and exhausted, sank back upon his pillow.

A deep silence pervaded the chamber, broken only by the sobs of mother and children. Her arm still supported the head of Germanicus, and her eyes were still intently fixed upon his face, vainly hoping that in its shifting expression she might discern some abatement of pain. She watched for some time, till at length a violent contraction of the brow and lip bespoke the approach of the final moment.

"Raise me," said Germanicus, faintly; "my wife—my children—I would speak with ye ere I die, I would bless and *warn* ye"—a keen glance gave additional weight to the emphasis—"yes, my wife, warn ye. 'Tis not, my Agrippina, the hand of nature which bends me to the grave; 'tis the blow of an enemy—of one who hath thwarted me in all things since I have left Rome. Thou knowest, my wife, that I have borne indignity with patience, and contumely with silence; but my virtues have only dug the snare deeper, and given a surer aim to the shaft of Piso. He hast at last—"

His words sank in silence, and as they dwelt upon the ear of the proud Agrippina, they left behind the resolution to avenge her husband's fate. As she gazed on him, and recognised in his prostrate form, his colorless lip and cheek, the testimony of his wrongs, her thoughts became too strong for control and the word, "vengeance," broke from her lips. It seemed for the moment to revive the decaying energies of the dying man: he raised himself in her arms, and fixed on her an expression of reproof—"My Agrippina," he said, "if this blow be from the

gods, shew thine obedience by bearing it in silence ; but, if from *man*, let not a feeble woman incur the persecution of more enemies, by resistance to those who are so already. Appeal to the senate, show thyself the grand-daughter of Augustus, the wife of Germanicus, who has given glory to Rome by filling her streets with the vanquished and their spoils, and crowned her legions with victory. Show them," he continued, extending his hands to his children, who clasped and wept on them, "Show them my orphans—my—children—but—no—revenge—"

His voice became broken, while a gesture of impatience signified that something yet remained untold ; he made a violent effort to speak—'twas vain—he placed his arm around the neck of Agrippina, and, drawing her ear closely to him, whispered—it was faint and indistinct, but as she heard the words—"malignity—Tiberius"—pride and indignation flushed her cheek. The dying soldier, as fearful that the haughty spirit of his wife might transgress his command of forbearance, raised his hand solemnly ; but strength had passed with life, and it fell. The poison had "o'ergrown his spirit." The soldier was no more.

From great emergencies lofty spirits derive additional strength. She had wept when she saw the approach of death, but now, that the blow was dealt, as she clasped the remains of her husband, and felt the gradual retreat of vital warmth, not a tear moistened her eye, not a murmur moved her lip. As she stood watching Germanicus, she seemed to partake immobility with the dead, while her expression combined firmness with disdain of those against whom she was about to employ it ; Caligula and Julia, with that instinctive feeling of childhood which recognizes in the death of a parent, a void which time cannot erase, nor the relations of friendship fill, wept bitterly, and climbing the couch, imprinted the last kiss of duty and affection on their cold and silent father, now dead to the feelings of nature, and insensible to their appeal.

CHAPTER III.

THE ROMAN MATRON.

THE body lay in state in the Forum at Antioch, where the funeral obsequies were performed with a degree of simplicity inconsistent with the rank and reputation of the deceased. The family images having been left at Rome, the remains of Germanicus were deprived even of the customary honour of being preceded by the statues of his ancestors. Livid spots appeared upon the body, and when it was consigned to the flames the heart remained *entire*.

This circumstance, when observed by those who surrounded the pile, compelled at once the expression of public opinion. The adherents of Germanicus were doubly confirmed in their attachment, when the appearance of his body excited suspicion as to the nature of his death; while the supporters of Piso defended their patron with equal warmth. The city was divided into faction, but the death of Germanicus remained still unavenged, and the criminal in the full enjoyment of his success.

At a council held by the commanders of legions, and those of senatorial rank, a governor was elected, whose first official step was to apprehend Martina (notorious for her practices in poison) and transport her to Rome. The friends of Germanicus evinced all the zeal requisite for a legal prosecution by the collection of testimony, and suspicion instantly fell on Martina, from her intimacy with the family of Piso.

Meanwhile Agrippina, her lofty spirit unbroken by affliction, resolved upon a step, which, perhaps, more than any one act in ancient or modern history, claims our admiration for the dignity of the female character.

She embarked for Italy, with the urn containing the ashes of Germanicus, and accompanied by her two orphan children. She doubted not that an appeal from the unprotected loneliness of a widow, would irresistibly engage the sympathies of

assembled Rome, and call down speedy vengeance on the murderers of her husband. Neither the rigorous season of the year, nor the dangers of wintry navigation could deter the high-minded matron and widowed mother from the fulfilment of her resolve. Rome, for which Germanicus had fought, could not be insensible to the silent appeal of his ashes, his widow, and his orphans.

CHAPTER IV.

ROME.

THE public mind was, in the meantime, fully prepared to receive the impression of Agrippina's appeal. The account of Germanicus' indisposition had given a fresh impulse to popular attachment, and their sympathies borrowed additional ardor from his absence in the provinces. The people, more frequently influenced by impulse than thought, were at once fired with suspicion at the arts which had been employed against the life of their prince, and acted upon that suspicion as though it were reduced to certainty. Assemblies were frequent throughout the city, in which the leaders did not fail to instigate the expression of popular sentiment, and openly avow the arts and injustice by which the life of their favorite had fallen.

"Was it for this," cried one, "that Germanicus was sent to distant climes, to perish apart from the people he had served with life and sword?"

"Germanicus and his sire," exclaimed another, "have both been snatched from Rome, because they were friends of the people, and desired to restore the old constitution."

Such was popular feeling upon the intelligence of his *illness*, a spark, which the tidings of his *death* kindled into a flame. Neither fear nor the restraint of the laws could repress the popular clamour, which, like a thunder-cloud, burst with greater vio-

lence for the still murmur which preceded it. Without either a magisterial edict, or decree of the Senate, there was a general cessation of business. The courts of justice were deserted; the good offices of society were forgotten; and each man, abandoning social intercourse, betook himself to bitter communion with his own thoughts. Friend passed friend in that sullen silence, unwilling to ask, because fearing the answer; sorrow was depicted on every face, and lamentation rose from every lip. The city seemed one general house of mourning, and its inhabitants to represent one family, met for the purpose of bewailing the death of a near and beloved relation. Nor was public sympathy exhibited more in expressions of grief, than in the honours lavished on the memory of the dead. His virtues and exploits were made the subjects of an apotheosis, by the insertion of his name in the *Carmen Seculare*—a hymn sung in honor of Mars, in a public procession by his priests through the streets of Rome; and triumphal arches were commanded to be erected in Rome, and throughout Syria, commemorative of his martial fame, as also of the fact that he died in the service of his country.

Piso had, in the meantime, made an abortive effort by violence to recover the government of Syria, which a public election had awarded to Marsus. This was the first declaration of feeling against the criminal. The public clamours at Rome could not, however, be appeased, save by his return and trial before the proper tribunal. They considered the blood of Germanicus to be on his head, and regarded the liberty which he enjoyed in a foreign country, as an insult to the law, and an attempt to elude its justice; by his continued absence the evidence was daily assuming a weaker character. Piso, at length, fearing to offend the emperor and aggravate the hostility of the people, taking a few precautionary steps, set sail, and arrived at Rome.

CHAPTER V.

AGRIPPINA ENTERS ROME.

THE widow and her children disembarked for a few days at the island of Corcyra, previous to her projected entry into the capital. She required some respite to subdue the agitation, and disarm the pain she had experienced in the death of Germanicus; the re-action of grief was more powerful in proportion to the happiness she had hitherto felt in domestic life, and the honor she had received from the public tongue, as the wife of the brave and the gentle Germanicus. The first blow of calamity brings with it also the power of resistance, while custom lends us patience and submission. So was it with Agrippina: prosperity had been her constant guest, while sorrow was a comparative stranger, and a short interval was required to enable her to recover that mental strength and self-possession, which would give her in the eyes of Rome not so much the appearance of the widow of Germanicus, as the vindicator of his memory, and the avenger of his death.

The intelligence of her arrival being rapidly and widely diffused, the feelings which prevailed during her absence derived additional glow and enthusiasm from her approach. The friends of the imperial family, officers who had served under the command of Germanicus, and eminent men from the surrounding municipal towns, all joined in one procession to express their homage and condolence with the widow of the murdered soldier. As the fleet of Agrippina rode into the harbor, the sea-coast, the house tops, their very walls thronged with human beings, seemed to be converted into one vast theatre to witness some pageant or exhibition. But in that dense mass, as the eyes of all were fixed on the galley which bore Agrippina, not a word was spoken, not a whisper escaped; the faculties of all seemed, as it were, to be centered in their hearts, whose feelings transferred to the eye the eloquence of its tears. A silence,

as of the tomb, pervaded that mighty throng, and the grief of the widow, and the loneliness of the orphans, had a champion in every breast and every eye.

Slowly and solemnly came on the fleet. No cheerful cry burst from the mariner, no bustle or activity in the management of his galley, no hail from the fleet, no greeting from the shore; silence, in that hour of grief, seemed native to the air and man, while the wave itself almost forgot its wonted murmur, as in accordance with the silence which was flung on all. The galley at length neared the shore, and the widow with her children disembarked.

First went Agrippina, bearing the urn containing the ashes of Germanicus, her eyes steadfastly fixed upon it; Caligula and Julia followed. A deep and simultaneous groan burst from the gazing multitude—men, women, strangers, relations—all swelled the general chorus of sympathy, which sounded like a requiem of the nation over the warrior's tomb.

Two prætorian cohorts met the procession by order of Tiberius, who wished, with his wonted dissimulation, to disguise his guilt by conferring honor on the dead. The urn was transferred to the centurions and tribunes, who bore it on their shoulders. They were immediately preceded by the colors, not flaunting gaily in the air, as though buoyed by the sense of recent triumph, but drooping with a negligence and melancholy, which bespoke the soldier's funeral. The lictors bore their fasces inverted. In the different colonies through which they passed, the populace, arrayed in deep mourning, joined the procession; while the Roman knights clad in their purple robes, threw into piles kindled for the purpose, perfumes, spices, and, garments, together with other offerings adapted to the funereal ceremony. Nor were the inhabitants even of distant towns, remiss in exhibiting their zeal and admiration of the dead: they flocked in crowds to join the train, and, prepared with victims crowned for the sacrifice, erected altars to the gods who presided over departed souls.

The procession, as it advanced, was joined by the distinguished members of the imperial house. Claudius, brother of Germanicus, and the four remaining children of the deceased, met and joined it. To them were added the consuls, and the whole body of the senate.

The road presented one vast concourse of human beings, assembled to deplore a great national calamity. They wept as they walked, not the tears of flattery or hollow eulogy, but those of honest grief and genuine sincerity. "Where the court," says Tacitus, "rejoiced in secret, men could not weep themselves into favor."

Tiberius, uncle of the deceased, did not appear. Dissembler as he was in private, as in the conduct of public affairs, he was fearful, perhaps, of betraying his guilt, by his inability to assume the grief which marked the deportment of all.

On the day which witnessed the interment of his remains in the tomb of Augustus, Rome, to use the expression of Tacitus, in its deep and solemn silence, assumed the aspect of "a desert." The field of Mars gleamed with torches; the people stood ranged in their different tribes, and the soldiers were under arms. But one general and absorbing sentiment pervaded all classes—grief for the dead.

The appeal on which the matron had so fully relied, was amply responded to by the sympathy and compassion of assembled Rome. "Nothing," says Tacitus, "touched Tiberius so nearly, as the affection of the people for Agrippina, who was styled the ornament of her country, and the last remaining model of her ancient manners."

CHAPTER VI.

THE UNBIDDEN GUEST.

Piso, in the mean time, accompanied by his wife Plancina, was on his way to Rome. Sailing down the Tiber, they disembarked at the field of Mars, near the tomb of the Cæsars.

The public sentiment, on their arrival, changed from grief to discontent and indignation. A man, branded as a criminal, dared to appear in the open day, unabashed by the public gaze, and surrounded by a numerous train of clients and flatterers. His entry into Rome assumed more the air of a triumph awarded for his services and success in his eastern administration, than possessing that sombre and unpretending character adapted to the circumstances of one who was cited to appear before the tribunal of his country. His demeanor was bold, undaunted, and confident.

The very night of his return, the murderer held a sumptuous banquet. It might be, he thought that the outward appearance of gaiety would disarm suspicion, and repel the charge. His house overlooked the Forum; and while mirth and revelry were lighting every eye, and gladdening every face, the deep and determined sentiments of hatred and revenge were mingled with imprecations on his name by those without.

With the reserved and abstracted air of one, who, though surrounded by a crowd, communes with the solitary tenants of his own heart, Piso answered the many welcomes which greeted him from the assembled guests. In the contracted brow and pale lip, were but too visibly depicted the pains and remorse which guilt had graven on his heart. The mirth of the light-hearted, the buzz of flatterers, and the smile of beauty, served only to contrast the stronger with the anguish which made all dark and desolate within, and to realise the fable of Tantalus, who was forbidden to touch, though within the

grasp of all that could attract or gratify the sense. Solitary and apart stood Piso, his thoughts and feelings scarcely diverted from their channel, by the gaiety and smiles which surrounded him.

As thus he leant against a column, heedless and thoughtful, a page, touching his arm, motioned him to follow. Anxious to relieve the anxiety of his thoughts, by any thing which promised change or novelty, Piso followed the messenger. They were soon in a passage unobserved by any—the page whispered—“A stranger, my lord, whose business is private, waits thy presence.”

“Where?” rejoined Piso, in a tone full of apprehension as to the nature of the interview.

“In thy chamber—” Piso hastened to the spot.

On entering, the stranger’s face, busily intent on the perusal of papers, prevented the power of recognition. The approach of Piso, however, diverted his attention, and looking up, the stranger disclosed the features of the emperor Tiberius. A cold and searching glance which he fixed on Piso, rendered the latter still more perplexed as to the cause or probable result of the visit. From the expression of Tiberius—still more ominous from the silence which accompanied it—he could augur nothing; nor even from the approaching interview, could he hope any alleviation of present difficulty, on account of the proverbial dissimulation of his character.

As he stood in silence, ignorant as to the reception of his addresses, Tiberius relieved his embarrassment.

“The game we have played has been high and perilous, and here are all the winnings we can boast—” his hand pointed to the documents which lay before him.

“What, my lord, are they?” enquired Piso, timidly.

“Charges against thee,” rejoined Tiberius, “the people are rash, determined, and headstrong, and mourn, as with a parent’s heart, the death of my nephew—I know not,” he continued, after a pause, “where or how it may end. Prosecutors are

appointed—some have volunteered, so strong is the impulse for revenge. In these they charge thee and thy wife with magical dealings with one Martina, of repute in those practices—take heed the charmed cup be not returned to thine own lip—her intercourse with thee has been notorious—thou hast been unguarded—silly as the assassin who shows his victim the tool with which he destines him to suffer.”

Tiberius rose from his seat and paced the apartment impatiently. The eyes of Piso followed him anxiously; he attempted to speak, but his voice was feeble and indistinct, his face became livid, his frame trembled, the threatened rage of the people almost realized the terrors of death, and confirmed its certainty, and his only chance of escape was in the propitiation of Tiberius. As the emperor passed him, he sank upon his knees. Tiberius paused near him, and surveying him sternly, said—“This clamor and violence could not have been, had the secrecy required, in my letters to you, and those of my mother Livia, been adopted. By this open and unguarded conduct, thou hast not only betrayed thyself, but even lent a weapon to the people against the majesty of Rome. Hast thou destroyed those letters?” The coldness and deceptive tranquility of manner which Tiberius had hitherto preserved, burst into an impetuous transport of rage, when informed that the correspondence was still in existence. “Where?” he exclaimed, in a tone of passion, which broke the last remaining hope of pardon in which the criminal had trusted.

“They shall be restored, my lord,” answered Piso; at the same time opening a small cabinet, he produced the letters.

“Restored, to be destroyed,” cried Tiberius, tearing them in fragments, and trampling on them,—“I am not the dotard that thou hast proved thyself, to catalogue my crimes for the inspection of every eye that chooses to read, and to betray——” He resumed his rapid pace to and fro, the working of his brow and lip attesting the agitated mind, and only tending to aggravate

the fears of Piso, who read his thoughts as legibly as in words. "By the want of prudence," continued Tiberius, abruptly, "every advantage hath been sacrificed, and every stratagem revealed to the eyes of men. After the death of Germanicus, thou did'st attempt, by violence, to recover the government of Syria, which the electors gave to Sentius. *Then* was not the time to strike the blow, or demand rights—thou should'st have returned to Rome, and sought our counsel, ere thou hadst been demanded by the public voice as a murderer, and seized by order of Sentius as a rebel. Hadst thou returned then, men would have regarded thee as aggrieved by the loss of Syria, and the sense of thy wrongs might have awakened sympathy, where now thou findest only hatred. To-night too—to-night—a banquet—I tell thee thou but tamperest with thy fate, as thou hast hitherto with the name of Cæsar."

"May I not claim at least thy favour?" responded Piso, scarcely daring to regard the visage of Tiberius, whose expression forbade the hope which he entertained.

"I cannot tell thee now," replied the emperor, in a more subdued and deliberate tone than he had hitherto used; "the people seem to have arrogated to themselves the office of judge—By the direction of that wind, which is ever uncertain, we must shape our course. Whatever favor can be shown must be private. The cause is transferred from the forum, and its importance hath laid it before the Fathers. With them I must confer—Martina too——"

"What of *her*?" said Piso, interrupting him, and breathless with trepidation."

"Is here," replied Tiberius, calmly, "Sentius, in his zeal to avenge and condemn, hath been vigilant to collect testimony—he hath transported the sorceress hither, who awaits in chains the day of trial." The murderer stood silent and appalled, as he recognized in the detention of Martina, the last blow to hope. "'Tis now the second watch," continued Tiberius, "I

must leave, as I came in secret. We must use dissembling with the senate, or the same fate involves us both."

When the wretched Piso had recovered from the reverie, into which the tidings of Martina had plunged him, the emperor had gone.

CHAPTER VII

THE TRIAL.

THE day at length arrived—the day awarded by justice, to avenge the cause of the widow and the orphan. The senate were seated to hear the trial, and the prosecution was opened by those who added the attachment of the friend to the zeal of the advocate, having served under Germanicus in Asia.

At the head of the Fathers sat Tiberius, still preserving that unalterable coldness of expression, which never once vacillated with the emergencies of the case; betraying neither emotion nor sympathy. Immediately opposite to him stood Piso; his arms were folded, and his eyes habitually fixed on the ground, were occasionally raised, when any unexpected disclosure lent a favorable aspect to his cause; but as they wandered from the witnesses to Tiberius, the apathy and sullen frown which marked his expression, depressed hope as rapidly as it had risen.

The prosecutors having reasoned on the preliminary charges, viz.: "That Piso had diffused a spirit of licentiousness throughout the soldiery;" "That in consequence, the profligate of the army had hailed him 'Father of the Legions;'" "That he was hostile to all good men, but more especially to Germanicus;" at length entered on the gist of the prosecution, viz.:—"His intercourse with magical arts and use of poison for the death of Germanicus."

On the introduction of the last charge, a visible shudder on the part of the criminal attracted the gaze of all; but, with a violent effort, he resumed his self-possession, standing firm and motionless. His hands were clinched; a deep and determined frown furrowed his brow, and his eyes were fixed upon some distant object with a steadiness which seemed to shun contact with any living gaze.

He had stood thus, as in a dream, for some minutes, when the heavy clank of chains struck on his ear. The sorceress rushed to his mind—fear was an omen of truth—he turned—their eyes met—a haggard smile overspread her wan and worn features—her hair, even more visibly tinged with grey, since last they met, fell with a disorder on her bare shoulders, which lent her a wild and weird appearance. Her eyes barely glanced on Piso, but he shrank even from that momentary glance, which triumphed not more in the perpetration than the consciousness of crime. She held in one hand an empty vial, and pointing it at Piso, a wild and hysterical laugh rang through the hall, which smote on the murderer's heart like the voice of conscience itself.

The hideous echo had no sooner subsided, than it was answered by a fierce and discordant yell, which seemed to burst from thousands assembled without the walls of the edifice.—The voices of the demagogues, like individual waves, were for a moment lost in the general tumult which burst with the fury of a tempest. The senators started from their seats, and even the studied apathy of Tiberius seemed to be supplanted by terror and alarm. At length clearly and distinctly rose the voices of the leaders, fiercely responded to by the mob. "Down with the statues of the murderers."—"To the Gemoniæ with them!"—"Away with this dealer in magic!"

A fearful pause followed, like that which succeeds the thunder-shock, when silence hangs over heaven and earth, and nature rests for a moment to rally her strength and terror. It was

a pause of deep unbroken silence to all, and of fear to Piso.—Stupid and terrified he stood rooted to the earth.—He dared not look up; and he *felt* that the eyes of all, with the force and unity of an Argus were fixed upon *him* alone. He closed his eyes, but the Scalæ, the mangled relics of malefactors—the last quivering pulse not animating, but giving them a posthumous energy, the very mimicry of life—the hideous appurtenances of death—the chain—the hook—all pierced with an appalling distinctness through the veil of darkness he endeavored to interpose. He tried to shut the yell of the mob from his ears, which burst with the inexorable wrath of an ocean, when it demands for its hecatomb, life, and youth, and wealth—but still it pealed in his ear—"The murderer!—the magician!—the Gemoniæ!"

It was but a moment, and all stood in wilderment and doubt. The sorceress now stood face to face with the murderer—her figure seemed to dilate; her hand quivered as she pointed her bony finger at Piso; her eyes glowed with a steady and fearful light, as though life were concentrating its decaying energies into one final effort, and she fell at his feet.

The soldiers who surrounded, raised her—they addressed her; she was silent. While they looked on her, her face became livid, and distorted. In bending over her, one of them was attracted by the unnatural appearance of her disordered hair—poison was discovered in its tangles. Germanicus was avenged. Martina was dead.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MURDERER'S FATE.

Piso was removed from the Senate-house in a litter, guarded by a tribune and band of prætorians, save for whose interposition the violence of the mob would have proved fatal.

On arriving at his house, he seemed to shun communion with all, refusing even the embraces of Plancina—forbidding her from following he hurried to his chamber—unsheathing his sword, he placed it on his couch, and having regarded it sternly for some moments, turned from it with a violent shudder.

"Truly," he said with an air of bitter derision, as he paced the chamber with agitation; "truly well hath my master said, 'We have played a high and daring game.' And what," he continued, twisting his hands in his hair with the wildness of a maniac, "Aye, what have been *my* winnings?—the curse of the mob!—a malefactor's death!—the Gemoniæ!—While the master-spirit who hath raised this tempest, smiles on the havoc he hath made, and rides in safety. Oh! 'tis ever thus with the courtier's fate—to serve—to watch—to wait upon the throne, and having done all, to be discarded like the leech, a foul and loathsome thing. Piso—Piso—thou hast dug thine own grave—the very mob who cursed thee will listen with joy to the crackling flames upon thy pile, and scatter thine ashes to the winds, unmoistened and unblest by libation!"

He buried his face in his hands, and the tears of agony and fear burst through his fingers. As he stood thus, a gentle knocking at the door announced Plancina. He started, and endeavoring to assume composure, hastened to a table, on which were spread some writing-materials, and busied himself apparently in writing.

"Nay," said Plancina, gently winding her arms around his neck, and, by the softness of her manner, endeavoring to win him from his cares; "nay, my husband, be not thus over-anx-

ious. Thy face is very pale—thine hand trembles—What is that thou art so intent upon ?”

“My defence,” rejoined Piso, in a deep and hollow voice, without raising his eyes.

“Thou hast not need,” replied Plancina, “of all this care—Tiberius and Livia are thy friends and mine.”

“Friends !” said Piso, with derision, his lips working with the violence of emotion ; “friends !—aye truly—such as death to the weak and trembling wretch when he ends pain, and care, and life. Friends !—the friendship of the sun to the earth, when it scorches into dust what it was made to warm and fertilize. Friends !—no—no—no more on’t. They have led me to a precipice, and deserted me on its very brink—they—who promised—but—no matter.—” His words became indistinct, and, rising from his seat, he turned from Plancina to conceal his tears. The affectionate wife followed—but smiles and caresses were alike lost on him, who, in imagination, saw nothing save the headlong violence of the people, heard nothing save their shouts of execration.

“Nay, my wife,” he said, “there is no hope now—would’st think the sorceress met me face to face in the senate-house ?—she is dead—dead by her own hand.—But ere she died, her wild and frenzied gestures branded me to all as the murderer of Germanicus.”

Both stood in silence, gazing on each other. Even Plancina, who had been an accomplice in the crime, as she felt the tears of the husband upon her cheek, desisted from the task of consolation she knew to be vain, when measured with the fate which threatened Piso.

“’Tis midnight,” said Piso, “I would be alone—the prosecution closes to-morrow—I have somewhat to prepare—”

“I will leave thee then,” said Plancina, as she still hung upon his neck, “but not to rest. To watch—to pray for thee—may the gods protect thee !”

“May they indeed protect me !” responded the wretched man,

as the prayer fell from his lips, more in the strength of despair than hope.

That was the last embrace of husband and wife—their last participation in joy or sorrow. They had lent themselves as instruments to the unholy will of a despot; they had trusted to his favor, but like a broken reed, it pierced them.

Piso that night committed suicide. The widow and the orphan were avenged.

MESSALINA.

A PASSAGE FROM THE REIGN OF CLAUDIUS.

Let us hide our loves—
Othello.

CHAPTER I.

THE LOVER.

"'Tis well-nigh the second watch, and not yet come!" said Messalina impatiently, as she sate alone in a remote apartment of the palace, communicating by a terrace with the gardens. The words were no sooner uttered, than a soft step, ascending the terrace, announced the approach of the expected lover.

Caius Silius, in the grace and beauty of his person, eclipsed all the Roman youth, and awakened in the bosom of the empress Messalina a passion, not more remarkable for its reckless and unblushing character, than unhappy in its results. United to Claudius, proverbial for his imbecility, she did not scruple to exhibit her contempt for the husband from whom she derived her greatness and her power. "As if," says Tacitus, "the imperial dignity had been transferred to another house, the retinue of the prince, his slave and freedmen adorned the mansion of her favorite."

"Truant to thine hour," said Messalina with a chiding playfulness, her eyes beaming with admiration, as they rested on the symmetry and noble bearing of his form.

"But not my word," rejoined Silius, "he were indeed a laggard in love, who obeyed not its summons from Messalina's lips." He clasped her to his bosom, and regarding her with tenderness—"I would," he said, "that the bright tissue the Fates have woven with our destiny, could not be severed ere our loves were blest!"

"What means my Silius?" said Messalina, shrinking from the ominous import of his words.

"There is a hand," rejoined Caius, after a pause, "may burst that web, and tangle us in its fragments."

"Whose?"

"Claudius," replied her lover. "Ignorance may be feigned, and vengeance may slumber beneath her guise."

"Ha!" replied Messalina, as a feeling of reproach lent a momentary flush to her cheek, "would'st shrink from the dangers a woman braves?"

"Not for myself," said Caius, "I fear not for myself, but thee. Claudius is slow to anger, but, once roused, terrible and vindictive."

"What would'st thou then?" rejoined Messalina; "would'st love to desert or betray? Have I not lavished on thee wealth, and raised thee to distinction? Is not thy mansion a palace? Hast thou not retinue rich and numerous, even as the imperial family?"

"All, all," said Silius.

"And what would'st more?" rejoined the offended beauty.

"Nought, save the assurance that our loves may be continued in the fortune they have met."

"Nay, there's yet more in this," rejoined Messalina; "speak! speak, my Silius—ah! thy love hath passed, even with the novelty which enchained it."

"Not so, by Venus!" replied the youth; "my heart is thine,

as ever. But thou knowest the rabble are ever quick in their devices, and courtiers maintain their favor by ready access to the monarch's ear?"

"Should it be thus," said Messalina, "the happiness which Rome denies can be sought elsewhere; I will fly with thee, and for thee sacrifice the throne which would sever us."

"There needs no *flight*," rejoined Silius, abruptly, and boldly discarding the mask of fear beneath which he had hitherto played his game of ambition, "there needs not *flight*. Our hearts are plighted, where then is the difference of rank or condition? As love levels the lofty, it can elevate the humble."

"I cannot reach thy meaning," said Messalina timidly, anxious, yet fearing its disclosure.

"The throne, and thee as my bride," exclaimed the lover, kneeling and pressing her hand to his lips. "Thou lovest not Claudius; why, then, be doubly false to thy nuptial vow, by feigning attachment to him thou but holdest in scorn? Beauty like thine, the idol of every eye, and theme of every tongue, were fitter mate for youth and passion, than for age and apathy. We have loved," he continued, clasping her hand with increasing fervor, "with the strength of those, who love more earnestly for the very secrecy which may be betrayed, while fear gave it intensity, from the very dangers which surrounded us. But that moment of secrecy and safety is passing, even while I kneel to thee: the thousands, who have spoken of thy gifts and honors will be prompt to relate the history of our passion."

"But Claudius—"

"Can be swept from our path!" interrupted Silius, starting to his feet, and instinctively laying his hand upon his sword-hilt. "Why should *he* live, unfit alike to be thine husband, or rule the people of Rome?"

"Not blood, my Silius, I would not have him die," rejoined Messalina, trembling as she regarded the progressive stages of her guilt.

"Well, then, let him *live*," returned the lover impatiently,

sheathing his half-drawn sword ; " age and weakness, like his, can easily be overpowered should he resist. The time is auspicious," he continued, after a moment's reflection, " the emperor goes to Ostia, to assist at a sacrifice ; in his absence can the nuptial-rite be consummated ; bribery can win the soldiery to our cause ; and for the people, it is but a change of masters, they will clamor for one after a time, as loudly as for another. Nay, consent—thou canst not deny thy Silius ?"

" Were there not danger to thee," said Messalina, " thou shouldst have consent, even as thou hast my heart. But—"

" Speak—speak," replied Silius, " if fear for me alone deter thee, I brave the danger for the glorious prize which lurks beneath it. Nay, hear me," he continued more urgently, as the hesitation of her manner omened unfavourably for the success of his suit ; "'tis not the cold and feeble pulse of age can respond to the beatings of a heart like thine. Love is not a flower which blooms beneath the chill and lowering sky of winter, but one which borrows hue and fragrance from the brightness of the summer's sun. Nor yet is it a flower, like those they tell of, that grows amid the waste, like a thing of beauty nature flings prodigally from her hand, to live companionless, and die neglected. No, fairest ! The heart that loves needs yet another to share its rapture, its joys, and fears. Where, then, can love find fitter mate than in him, who, for thee, hath braved the frown of power, and the terrors of its punishment ?"

The reluctance, which Messalina had hitherto evinced, gradually yielded to the earnest supplications of her lover. Though enamoured of Silius, and reckless as to the notoriety of her passion, she was for the moment restrained from acceding to his proposal by motives of policy, rather than feelings of affection for Claudius. She feared that participation in the imperial power, by directing his feelings to the channel of ambition, might impair the influence she had acquired and maintained through love alone. But resolution could not withstand the earnestness of his manner, and the fervour of his entreaties.

She yielded ; but the step, which was intended to supplant Claudius, recoiled fearfully on paramour and mistress.

CHAPTER II.

THE PLOT.

It was midnight. The gay and festive scene of the bridal was usurped by the silence of the hour. The lamps were burning dimly round the bridal board, and the last echoes of the epithalamium—"Io Hymen"—had died away with the revelry of the marriage guests. Still was not the hall deserted. At the remote end of it, scarcely distinguishable from the thickening gloom which surrounded them, stood three figures, engaged in deep and earnest conference. Their voices scarcely rose above a whisper, and the interest of the theme which occupied their attention, might be concluded from their nervous and emphatic gestures.

"Aye," continued Narcissus, in reply to a previous observation ; "Had she still evinced a passion for Mnester, as long as our stupid emperor remained ignorant of it, the people had no cause for murmur. The dishonor was to Claudius, but danger threatened not Rome ; but now—now, we have every thing to fear."

"Every thing," rejoined Pallas, at that time the reigning favorite in the court of Claudius ; "Every thing—The throne is openly usurped, not by an upstart, whose rashness and daring would be as speedily avenged as exhibited ; but by one of noble blood, whose birth, talents, and accomplishments can be summoned to the support of his ambition, and the maintenance of his claims—Consul elect beside ! What interest can he not procure for his cause ? What power can he not com

mand to force compliance, and awe the refractory to his will?"

"It needs not a prophet's eye," said Callistus—an assassin by repute, having taken an active part in the murder of the preceding emperor Caligula—whose restless spirit was ever foremost in sowing discontent, as in reaping the harvest of bloodshed; "It needs not a prophet's eye to penetrate the measure, which this farce of a marriage rite but thinly disguises. His ambitious spirit will not curb its flight short of the throne, till, emboldened by success, he will ascend it, not as emperor, but master. Death—I say—death."

"Not so," interrupted Narcissus; "Were that to be our weapon it should fall on both alike—Hark ye," he continued, drawing them closer to him, and looking round the hall now almost buried in darkness, save for the light of a solitary lamp; "Hark ye—in the punishment of the guilty we must not neglect our own interest and advancement. Both are assured by imposing on the credulity of Claudius as to our loyalty towards his person, and desire for the preservation of its honor—Thus are the guilty punished, and we share the spoils of their downfall."

"But Claudius is at Ostia," interposed Pallas.

"True," rejoined Narcissus, "*there* he must be apprised of all, and that speedily before he and Messalina meet, otherwise her defence may so work upon him, as to render him insensible to her guilt, or his own shame."

"This is but slow work," rejoined Callistus, anxious to signalize himself in the service of Claudius by some sanguinary deed; "It is but slow—Better they were murdered in their bridal bed. Crime is more surely revenged for the speed with which penalty follows it."

"Rash and unthinking," replied Narcissus, anxious to arrogate to himself alone the execution of his plan; "Blood, since the fall of Caligula, is ever the theme of thy bold tongue. I tell thee were murder done within these walls, in the absence

of Claudius, there would be a rising in Rome that would require more than *thine* arm, albeit daring as it is, to quell."

"Then I will repair to Ostia with thee," rejoined Callistus, unwilling that Narcissus should monopolize the honor of the disclosure.

"Have a care," said Pallas, with the caution of an experienced courtier, who feared to compromise station and favor by resistance to power; "Have a care, how ye brave the anger of Messalina. Claudius, mindless, spiritless, and stupid, is but the passive tool of her caprice or vengeance. Know ye not that for *her* the best blood in Rome hath been shed. He is weak and uxorious, and his fondness for her will readily induce belief in any tale she may forge, to extenuate her offence. Have a care, I say—She is the stronger of the two; she hath ruled him hitherto, and her power and wiles may be an overmatch for your designs. For me—I stir not from Rome."

The warnings of the cunning courtier were inadequate to the task of dissuading the others from their enterprize. They relied upon the strength of their cause, and the character of Claudius; whose habitual imbecility and mildness of manner, though frequently exchanged for fierce and ungovernable rage, gave strength to their hopes and resolution. On the following day Narcissus and Callistus departed for Ostia.

CHAPTER III.

CLAUDIUS CESAR.

WHILE his name was being dishonored at Rome, and the stability of his throne endangered, Claudius was loitering at Ostia, insensible alike to his dignity and peril.

In the meantime the courtiers lost not a moment in the fulfilment of their intention to speed to his presence. They were

admitted; and with countenances whose expression was well calculated to alarm the equanimity of the imbecile emperor, proceeded, but cautiously, to the disclosure.

"What mean this silence and these grave looks?" said Claudius, as he hastily glanced from one to the other; "Is all well at Rome? Doth Messalina love me still? Are the prætorians firm to my throne? Speak—speak—"

"All is well—but—"replied Narcissus; by this sudden check giving fancy scope to encrease fear.

"But what," said Claudius, his impatience heightening with suspense; "I swear, while ye delay thus, a throne might be lost, and the usurper placed upon it—what hath befallen?"

"The empress"—replied Narcissus, again checking himself.

"Ha! what of *her*!" said Claudius, with more excitement than was his wont to exhibit.

"Pardon for thy freedman, Cæsar," replied Narcissus, with well-dissembled sympathy; "he cannot *speak* the things would wound his master."

"Wound me!—how—what—the empress?" said Claudius, uttering abruptly his broken reflections.

"I dare not speak," reiterated Narcissus kneeling, drawing from his bosom a parchment, and presenting it to Claudius; "but do thou *read*."

As Claudius received the parchment, the freedmen exchanged glances, and both instantly fixed their gaze upon the emperor.

He seemed to read it twice or thrice over, as though unable either to comprehend or believe the intelligence it contained.—The freedmen regarded each other with impatience, while Narcissus resolved by art and ingenuity to inflame the natural coldness of his character, and nerve it with resolution, should he exhibit his wonted weakness and vacillation.

The eyes of Claudius at length became fixed upon the parchment. His frame for the moment exhibited no emotion, save for the violence with which he grasped the document. At

length a deep sigh seemed to disburthen his heart—the tears fell copiously on the parchment, which he seemed unconscious of holding. His lips grew pale, and the indistinct words fell from them—"Messalina—false—false—to me!" His tears seemed to flow rather from the tender recollections of childhood, when *the man* weeps, some broken tie, some still-remembered joy, and scene of his early days, than from the degraded honor and slighted love of the husband. It seemed a sorrow more of melancholy than of bitterness; of despair rather than revenge.

The wily courtiers felt that their game was lost, should they not succeed in arousing the inactive disposition of Claudius from its lethargy of grief. Narcissus began, by alarming him as to the ambition of Silius, and the precarious tenure of his throne.

"Will Cæsar," he said, "pardon the zeal of his servant in detailing wrong and evil, even though they grieve him?"

"Oh! my Messalina—would that thou wert *mine* still!"—was the irrelevant answer he received.—"Cæsar knows my love," continued Narcissus, undeterred by one failure; "love that I would seal with my life."

"Away—away," said Claudius, pressing the parchment to his face, and weeping bitterly upon it. "Talkest thou of love to me?"—Where is *thy* love, Messalina?"

"My lord," resumed Narcissus, "I have not come to wound alone without the power of healing. These tears are but idle, when sterner measures should claim thine acts and feelings.—Hear thy servant, and be advised, or *Rome* may be also lost."

"Rome! Rome!—Is *that* gone too?—Wifeless!—Houseless!—Then indeed have I cause to weep," said Claudius, scarcely raising his face.

"Rome is not, *but may be lost*," rejoined Narcissus, endeavoring to awaken the torpor of Claudius to a sense of his condition, by the emphasis of his tone.

"May be—may be—Rome lost!" reiterated the emperor.—

"Then Claudius, thou no longer reignest—Silius—Silius—will wear thy crown."

The courtiers looked on each other for some moments in silent wonder. The powers of his mind seemed to be completely paralyzed by that very intelligence on which they relied to stimulate and quicken them. The dignity of the monarch, the danger of a rival's ambition, and the stability of his throne; all considerations for action and resolve, seemed absorbed in the childish excess of grief. They conferred a moment together, resolved on not abandoning their task, till the exhaustion of every stratagem.

"My lord," said Narcissus, speaking very slowly, and approaching Claudius; "The camp is in danger, and the prætorians liable to be seduced by the arts and ambition of Caius Silius. Thy presence is needed at Rome to restore tranquility to the one, and ensure the loyalty of the other."

"Rome!" reiterated Claudius, gazing on him with a stupid wonder; "Rome! What have I to do at Rome?"—Another—not Claudius, fills the throne."

"*If your own safety demand your presence there,*" rejoined Narcissus —

"Ha! what sayest thou?" answered Claudius, giving to *self* the consideration he had refused to his own honor, and that of his throne.

"My own safety!—Do the prætorians desert their eagles?—Do my people forget me?"

"Cæsar," replied Narcissus, "may witness these things, if speedy measures be not taken —"

"Leave me—leave me—friends—I would be alone," returned Claudius abruptly, pressing his hands to his head; "a thousand thoughts throng here—I thank ye for your zeal—I would have some moments to myself—I will confer with ye presently—I thank ye."

His voice faltered; while weakness and irresolution resuming their sway, he sank upon a couch, and gave vent to his grief.

The courtiers withdrew, despairing alike of the success, as the rewards they had anticipated. Imbecile and uneasy as ever, they knew not whether he would remain at Ostia in tame submission to his injuries, or proceed to Rome, to avenge the violated honor of his bed, and the insulted dignity of his throne.

CHAPTER IV.

THE REVELS.

IN the mean while, the flight of time passed at Rome unnoticed by the lovers, in an ever-varying round of pleasure. Passion, while it lent oblivion to care, steeped the senses in fancied security. Such is the world which love builds in the heart of youth—all is future; memory flings not one shadow athwart the scene—hope plants every flower in the lover's path, and imagination tints their leaves from her exhaustless urn. It dreads no thorn, where hitherto, it has been charmed only by hue and odour; and through the vistas of its paradise, it cannot see those weeds and cankers which sorrow scatters in the pilgrimage of life—its heaven beams with a thousand stars, where no shadow slumbers, no tempest gathers. Alas! a spirit has woven that world, and a spell can disenchant it, "as a breath has made."

Autumn was then drawing to a close, and in honor of the season, a portion of the palace, by order of Messalina, was fitted up for the purpose of representing the ceremony of the vintage. The wine-presses poured forth copious streams of the inebriating juice, while around the vats danced a troop of women, attired like Bacchantès with tiger-skins—their songs and gestures wild and frantic, seemed to partake the inspiration of the god whose rites they celebrated.

Messalina mingled with the revellers, enlivening the scene

with her beauty and animation, while the grace of her person borrowed additional charm from the fanciful wildness and mythological character of her costume. She bore a Thyrsus in her hand, while her hair fell loosely upon her shoulders, and waltzed with every breath and motion. Silius was ever at her side in the dance. The light and flowing drapery which enveloped his person—the wreaths of flowers which bound his temples, and flung their fragrance on the air—the unequalled grace and symmetry of his figure—all lent him an air of spiritual beauty; and the spectator might have regarded him not so much the worshipper, as the god descended to witness the celebration of his own mystic rites. His arm clasped the waist of his lovely Helen, as they moved to the strains of voluptuous music, answered by the chorus of the revellers.

"A libation—a libation my queen, to the god!" exclaimed Silius, suddenly withdrawing from a fascination about to prove as fatal as the magic song of the Syrens—"What—ho! boy," he continued, addressing a beautiful youth, who, according to fashion, stood prepared with his Cyathus to measure out the wine to the guests; "fill me a measure" The boy dipping the goblet in the Amphora (in which the wine was generally conveyed into the banquet hall) presented it to Silius.

"To thee, Lenæus,* we pour this libation!"—so saying, he scattered the wine upon the floor. A frantic shout, partaking alike the character of ecstasy and prayer, burst from the circle of the Bacchanals, as they witnessed the offered libation—their gestures became more impassioned, and as they wheeled through the irregularities of the dance, their wild and rapid motions, and violent gesticulations, gave them the aspect of so many Pythian priestesses after they had inhaled the intoxicating vapour from the Parnassian cave.

One of the revellers, as under a sudden impulse, detaching himself from the group, climbed up an artificial vine-tree, round

* The regular formula was "*Libo tibi.*" according to the particular god supplicated in the libation.

which the votarists still continued their frenzied round—"Dance on—dance on," he cried, "Ha! ha! the stars will not always shine—I see a cloud—a tempest gathers at Ostia."

The revellers heard him not, but had it been the response of the Sybil herself, the words could not have sunk with a gloomier and more ominous weight upon the lovers. Like those who gaze upon the sullen hovering of the thunder-cloud, delay had beguiled them with the delusive hope of safety, and they were willing to construe its momentary silence into the suspension of its terrors and desolation.

CHAPTER V.

CLAUDIUS RETURNS.

THAT heaven which youth and hope had painted to the lovers' eyes with brightness false and unreal, was now lowering and overcast.—Sunshine became dim even in its meridian strength, and when they turned to their own hearts, they found there but the melancholy reflection of the surrounding gloom.—Hope had abandoned them, and fear now occupied the home he had deserted. The emperor—the husband was on his way to Rome.

The wretched woman, as the hour of retribution approached, relinquished gaiety and pleasure for the solitude of her chamber. Her children—Octavia and Britannicus—were almost her only companions, and by the affection of the mother she endeavoured to atone the falsehood of the wife.—Yet it was not the genuine feeling of the mother's heart, which called forth these endearments, but rather a motive of policy which was about to make them advocates of her cause, and mediators between their disunited parents.

As, shortly after the event related in the preceeding chapter,

she was thus closeted with them, instructing them in the part they were to play, Silius entered the chamber. The gaiety and buoyancy of his manner formed a strong contrast to the melancholy demeanour of the guilty empress, and the splendour of his attire to the utter neglect which the violence of grief had imparted to her person.

"How now, my queen," he said, seating himself beside her; "'tis not because that dotard approaches Rome, that thou should'st weep thus—thou art *still* my queen," he continued, pressing her hand to his lips; "aye, by Jupiter! and shalt be."

"Call me not *queen*, Silius," answered Messalina, in the broken accents of pain and grief; "no—no—no longer *queen*—mistress—abandoned—despised—any thing but *queen*—" She turned from him, and sinking her head upon the couch, her tears flowed afresh.

"Wilt thou then," rejoined Silius, somewhat dismayed at being left to contend against the rage of Claudius, single-handed; "wilt thou then retract the faith thou hast pledged to me in presence of the augur, and ratified by the consent of those of thy people who witnessed our union?—Is this thy love?—Woman—woman—weak art thou in danger, and fickle in thy love."

"Not so, my Silius," cried Messalina, starting from her attitude of grief; "Thou wrongest me—I am constant to thee, even as at the hour which made me thine. Ill-starred hour," she continued, relapsing into sorrow—"that gave me the love of one, to curse with the vengeance of another!"

"Hear me, Messalina," said Silius, withdrawing her from the hearing of her children; "This danger must be faced with the same boldness which hath marked our loves. One concession, while it shows our weakness, will only invest our adversary with additional strength. The prætorians can be bribed to our side, and with their aid we can defy the anger of Claudius, and secure his throne. A prize as fair as thou,

my queen, must not be lost, while there is a sword to draw, or a hand to wield it. I will to the camp."

"Hold," exclaimed the wretched woman, detaining him, her mind distracted by the conflict of opposite expedients to appease the approaching storm; "Hold—were not entreaty better than resistance? he is weak and irresolute; quick to anger, but slow to revenge; he loves me, Silius—and though I have wronged him, I doubt not that he will hear and spare me. My children too—Their appeal—" Her voice became weak and stifled, as she looked upon them; and conscious that the curse of guilt and dishonor might recoil upon them, the tears of repentance for the first time supplanted the witnesses of fear.

"Weep not, my love," said Silius, as he gazed with rapture on her beauty, which, like a landscape seen through the light haze of a summer rain, borrowed a softness from her tears; "As thou art wife and mother, the love of Claudius cannot be deaf to the appeal of both. For myself I reck not, so that thou art safe. Let the punishment of both fall on Silius only, and he will bear it patiently—yea, give it a kindly greeting—if, in death, he have still thy love."

Messalina was silent. Her love was strong even amid the ruin and danger which it threatened. She still clung to Silius, in that fatal moment, with all the tenderness and ardor of infant passion. So winds the ivy round the tempest-shaken tree, whose downfall rends its roots from the soil, and scatters its leaves to the storm.

CHAPTER VI.

THE MEETING.

CLAUDIUS was now not far from Rome. He was accompanied in his chariot by Narcissus and two others. He seemed at last to have thrown off that dreamy imbecility in which his mind habitually slumbered, and assumed strength and resolution proportioned to the emergency which demanded his return. His doubts and apprehensions embraced even a wider scope than that warranted by the infidelity of the Empress, and the dishonour reflected on himself. His mind was engrossed not more by objects of domestic care, than those of public concern. He feared the disaffection of the prætorians, and the bold and aspiring intrigues of Silius. The same ambition which instigated the marriage, would not hesitate at the furtherance of its schemes, and the establishment of its power by the corruption of the soldiery. On the favor of the cohorts might be said to depend the destinies of the throne. Geta, at this time, commanded the guards; a man, whose vacillation of character, rendering him ripe for any revolutionary measures, excited doubt and dispelled confidence. The broken reflections of the emperor sufficiently evinced his fears upon the subject, and Narcissus did not hesitate to improve the emergency to his own advantage.

"My lord," replied Narcissus, in answer to a previous observation from Claudius—"your fears are well grounded; Geta is not the man to command the prætorians at a moment when the peace of Rome may be disturbed by a bold and aspiring man. What may not be wrought by Silius, who enjoys the favor of the empress, and holds possession of the palace?" a keen and searching glance followed this question, which cut like a double-edged sword—reminding Claudius of the power of his rival, and the loss of his wife.

The emperor did not reply, but a sudden start showed that the blow fell as keenly as intended. The favorite followed up the attack.

"The occasion presses, my lord," he resumed; "ambition, like the bird, acquires strength proportioned to the height to which it soars, till overtaken by the hunter's shaft. In the hand of Cæsar lies the shaft to bring down this enemy, who dares to sport with ties public and domestic."

"True—true, Narcissus," said Claudius, as though for the first time he were sensible of the ambition of Silius, and the danger to which it exposed him. "True—but how, how shall we bring this eagle down?"

"But by one step," rejoined Narcissus; "secure the loyalty of the prætorians, and the rest is easily accomplished. The criminal is punished, and thy throne is safe."

"Who can serve me in this?" said Claudius, as doubtful of reposing confidence.

"On whom?" replied Narcissus, with feigned surprise; "on thy freedman—on him who would serve thee with life and hand—on Narcissus." He watched with anxiety the effect of his appeal, but from the stolid unmeaning expression of Claudius, he could infer nothing either favorable or otherwise.

The emperor relapsed into his customary silence.

The city at length rose to view. Its prospect seemed to awaken in Claudius' mind associations connected with his character and situation as husband. His affections wavered between attachment and duty. He alternately inveighed with bitterness and reproach against Messalina, and anon would use expressions of tenderness and pardon. He would again wander from the guilty mother to the harmless and unprotected children. He would, as in imagination, fondle and caress them; and while he saw their outstretched hands, and heard their tearful prayers for Messalina, callousness and resolution would relinquish their sway, and the tenderness of the father would succeed the sternness of the judge.

In the distance was observed a chariot, moving forward at a slow and melancholy pace. It was that which conveyed the empress. It was marked by no stately trappings consistent with the rank of her it bore; it was followed by no equipage; Messalina was seated, her head buried in her hands, and the convulsive heavings of her bosom attesting the violence of her emotion. On either side stood her children; their tender arms, (with that steadiness of filial love which swerves not in the hour of guilt and shame, whose embrace, like the better angel of our nature, charms away grief by awakening the instinct of a parent's heart) were clasped around that guilty mother's neck; they wept with her—they kissed her—they implored her to dry her tears; with the thousand endearments of children, they endeavored to chase away her sorrow, and, with the voice of nature strong within them said, "that they would beseech their father, and that he would not be deaf to his children." Thus innocence hung on the form of guilt. Unlike the statue in the embrace of the Cretan, she moved not, warmed not in the arms which clasped her.

They at length met. She descended from her chariot, leading Octavia and Britannicus; Claudius, as for the moment stung by the recollections her presence awakened, turned from her, while his averted hand sufficiently spoke the utter hopelessness of the appeal. She knelt, her children following the example of their mother; her hands were folded on her bosom, almost shrouded by the loose hair which fell on it, a custom adopted by the Romans to denote the utter negligence of grief. Alas! how changed from the gay and light Bacchantè, who led the dance in the Dithyrambic rites! Gladness seemed for ever to have fled that brow, and the frown it had left in parting, hung like a cloud amid the fading light of departed day.

"My husband," she exclaimed, extending her clasped hands towards the chariot, "hear thy wife?"

"Not so," cried Narcissus rising, apprehensive lest the spectacle of wife and children, and the natural eloquence of sorrow,

might soften the purpose he had confirmed ; "not so, woman—no longer wife nor empress—mistress ! bride of Silius ! Ay, thou hast pledged thyself to him, before the gods, and in the sight of assembled Rome. Take heed that *he* play thee not false, as *thou*," he added, subduing his voice and pointedly addressing Claudius, "hast thy lord and emperor." Claudius turned not, answered not, but Narcissus, perceiving from the violence of his emotion the contest between resolution and weakness, determined to pursue the advantage which his coolness and effrontery had given him. "Com'st thou here," he continued, "as criminal or injured, that thus thou darest make thy guilt a weapon of appeal and strength ? Or hast thou come hither to brand thine husband with the image of his own disgrace and misery ? Hence, woman, hence !"

As he spoke, his eyes fell on Claudius, silent and in tears ; and the stern smile, which for the moment lit his features, expressed the malignant joy he felt, in being the sole arbiter of Messalina's fate.

"I ask not for myself," cried the wretched woman, rising, and in her own hands clasping those of her children ; "not for myself—my children. Claudius—emperor—I am guilty, visit not the mother's crime on the children of thy lawful bed ; Hear me, my lord, oh ! hear and answer me " She sank again upon her knees, clasped her children to her bosom, and raising her tear-dimmed eyes to heaven, said, "the gods, my children, will hear us."

While she was yet speaking, the artful favorite resolved no longer to hazard the success of the appeal, determined at once to bend the vacillation of Claudius to his own purpose : muttering "paramour—Silius—mistress !" he drew from his bosom a parchment, and presented it to the emperor—"read, my lord," he said, "read this history : love is the tale, but it is poisoned by *adultery*."

Claudius held it for a moment, gazing on it with a vacant

37437

and unmeaning stare, and, tearing it asunder, flung the fragments from him.

"See'st thou this, adulteress?" exclaimed Narcissus, with triumph, "and seek'st thou mercy, even from him thou hast wronged and wounded? Asks the serpent mercy of him it has stung to madness? Even such shalt thou have thyself, when he turns and treads it to the earth."

Messalina was speechless; the continued silence of Claudius too plainly spoke the resignation of her cause to the exclusive control of the favorite, while the deep and determined enmity of the latter broke the last tie her hopes had connected with the tenderness of husband and father.

At a sign from Narcissus the chariot moved on, leaving the miserable woman, still kneeling in the embrace of her children, her eyes wandering from one to the other, in the abstraction of grief and repentance.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CAMP.

WITH the increasing danger of the emergency, declined the spirits of Caius Silius. Power and numbers were opposed to him, and the desire of Messalina to propitiate the rage of Claudius diminished his confidence, while it weakened the pretensions of his ambition. With their short-lived love, fled the gay and deceptive vision of imperial power, which had hitherto maintained and strengthened it; and the impossibility of tampering with the loyalty of the prætorians, sufficiently evinced the abortiveness of his schemes, and the vanity of realizing them by violence or resistance. Ambition had experienced a fatal and humiliating blow: the empress of Rome was *a suppliant*, kneeling for her life, and the aspirant to the throne was

a prisoner in the camp, awaiting his sentence from the very monarch he had expected to command and dethrone.

The temporary power, which the weakness of the emperor granted to his favorite, the latter resolved to hold till his designs were accomplished. As they progressed, the continued silence of Claudius was more than counterbalanced by the vehemence of Narcissus, and the wily insinuations he flung out against the miserable pair. An opportunity soon offered, for the satisfaction of his malignity to the utmost.

They were passing the mansion of Silius. Gloomy and deserted it appeared, as the fortunes of its once happy tenant. No clients thronged the door, no gay and glittering equipage bespoke the power of its master, or the favor which had once invested it with the splendors of a palace. Silent and neglected it stood, like a temple the gods had cursed for the guilt of the worshippers. Its halls and chambers were tenantless, but there still remained within them, the costly ornaments of the imperial household; in darkness and neglect they lay, like gilded trappings in the tomb.

"Look here," cried Narcissus, with well-dissembled indignation, "even here, hath he not insulted the majesty of the Fathers, by violating their decree? Have they not ordered his father's statue to be removed and destroyed, and here—here it still remains, in spite of power and decree? Cæsar," he continued, changing his tone to that of servile adulation, "hath returned in time to check arrogance and punish guilt."

As they advanced, the gorgeous furniture, the ornaments of wealth and devices of luxury, which had been removed from the palace, burst on their view. Narcissus, before he made this last appeal, paused a moment to watch the effect of this unexpected scene; his weak and senseless victim looked round more with an air of vacancy, than astonishment. As the spectacle, however, grew upon his sight, and the recognition of various ornaments lent truth to the scene and conviction to his own mind, his eyes slowly filled with tears, and clasping his

hands to them, he trembled so violently as to require the support of his tormentor. The occasion was ripe, and improved by the subtle courtier.

"Thou weep'st, my lord," he said, in a tone of condolence, "I wonder not, when here thou see'st the betrayal of thine own rights as husband, and insult to thy power as emperor. What! weep'st thou? And shall not every tear thou shed'st be atoned by the blood of those who wronged thee? Doth *Cæsar* weep, and Silius live? Look here," he continued, like the tiger, collecting his energies for the last and fatal spring, "here—here thou see'st the rewards of honor and valor; the ornaments of the Drusi, aye—even those of thy sire, now hung up as trophies of adultery, and the wages of her guilt." While he yet spoke, with an impatient gesture Claudius dashed aside his tears, and folding his arms, gazed with stern composure on the witnesses of his misery and dishonor.

The half-stifled murmurs of rage and indignation, and the bitterness which wreathed the lips of Claudius, were so many tributes to the success of Narcissus' designs. The eyes of the emperor wandered from one object to another, and as he recognised in all, the ornaments of the imperial household, and the honors conferred upon ancestral virtue, now dimmed and tarnished as the vile instruments of unholy love, his characteristic weakness seemed to borrow strength from the sense of wrong, and in the intervals of ill-suppressed rage, Narcissus heard with joy the deep and resolved mutterings, "revenge—revenge!"

"Aye, my lord," reiterated the courtier, "thou hast rightly said—Revenge. Nought can atone thy wrong save vengeance, quick and deep. By tarrying here longer, I would not gash the wound more deeply, I meant but to heal. Even while we speak, purpose may cool; the lovers wanton in the security of deferred revenge; and the blow itself be anticipated by the machinations of Silius. Let's to the camp—there, surrounded by strength and loyalty, pronounce the traitor's doom."

The monarch was but a tool in the hands of his courtier; a weak and plastic instrument, which, like clay in the potter's hand, could be moulded to any shape of design or will. He acquiesced in the suggestion, and, remounting the chariot, they pursued their way to the camp.

The Roman camps were in the form of a square, having on each side a gate, the two principal of which were called the Prætorian and Decuman. They were also divided into two parts—upper and lower. In the upper part, next to the prætorian gate, was situated the commander's tent, called Prætorium. With haste and secrecy Claudius entered it, and, having conversed a few minutes there, returned, accompanied by Geta, Narcissus, and a military train.

A large body of soldiers awaited his return without the Prætorium, and when he appeared, loud and tumultuous were the clamors that greeted him. They sounded in the ears of the wretched man as a mockery of the honor and greatness they were meant to hail; the color fled from his cheek; and as he walked by the side of Narcissus, his hand rested on his shoulder for support.

"My lord," whispered the favorite, "this is but an exposure of disgrace; let not the soldiers see this weakness; they greet thee heartily; we must to the Principia;* there thou canst show thyself not unmindful of their loyalty."

"Lead on," returned Claudius, in a faint and indistinct tone.

The order and discipline of the camp were, for the moment, forsaken, and each soldier, as he pressed eagerly forward toward the emperor's person, seemed zealous to exhibit his devotion to his cause. They were now approaching the statue of Claudius, and, as they passed it, the object which gave depth and fervour to *their* feelings, only served as a fresh oc-

* The Principia was a broad space dividing the two sections of the camp, upper and lower. Here was erected the commander's tribunal, either to administer justice, or harangue the troops. Here were also kept the standards of the army, the statues of the gods, and emperors.

casion to revive the bitterness and shame of their master. As though actuated by one spirit, the whole crowd paused in silence and dismay when they beheld Claudius, with averted hand, point to his own statue, and sink his head upon the bosom of his freedman.

The momentary weakness, however, soon passed, and another shout rent the air as they beheld, with a slow and steady step which bespoke resolution, their emperor ascend the tribunal.

His voice faltered from shame and emotion. As he recurred, however, to the theme, his cheek flushed, and his eye kindled at the sense of the wrongs he invoked them to redress. "It was not the violated feelings" he said, "of the husband and father they were called on to avenge; but rather the trampled dignity of the throne—the sacred person of a Cæsar—their own eagles, they were summoned to defend!"

The cry for vengeance was unanimous, as though it came from one heart. "Vengeance! vengeance!" re-echoed through the camp; and, in the tumult, some, detaching themselves from the rest, returned in haste, dragging with clamor and insult, the gay and beautiful Silius in chains.

As he stood before the tribunal, none could recognise in the neglected attire, the dim and sunken eye, the care-worn cheek, those boasted beauties which awakened the envy of man, and won the love of woman. With the brief intoxication of passion, was dissolved the dreamy charm of its existence. Hope had for ever fled; and those bright visions, which, borrowing hue and shape from fancy's pencil, made the heart a paradise, left it but a lone and dreary waste to memory. The pride of successful love was now exchanged for the humility of the captive; and the vague dreams of ambition for the certainty of fear, and the prayers of the suppliant. The comeliness of youth, like a flower chilled and withered in the spring, was faded by the hand of grief; while its joy and spirit had for ever passed, even like music which dies while yet we hear it.

The spectator might well have apostrophized him in the words of the poet:

"Quantum mutatus ab illo Hectore!"

The courage which Claudius had acquired, partially from resolution, and the loyalty he had witnessed in the camp, became daunted on the approach of Silius. Their eyes met but for a moment, while the judge was scarcely less affected than the criminal, whose life now hung upon his frown.

The clanking of chains, accompanied by the violent fall of a body on the earth, broke the trance into which grief and irresolution had plunged the wavering Claudius. He turned, and beheld Silius prostrate before the tribunal.

"Speak—speak," he exclaimed, raising his manacled hands to Claudius; "speak—though it be to bid me depart and die. Why should I live, unloved, a captive, and an outcast? on me fall all thy vengeance! on me, the guilty! But spare—oh! spare the wife—the mother." While he yet spoke, Narcissus, who stood by Claudius' side, forgot not the part he had hitherto played with such ardor and success. His eyes passed rapidly from Claudius to the prostrate form before him, and, as his finger pointed to Silius with stern contempt, he murmured in a deep and hurried tone—"death."

"Be it so," exclaimed Claudius, with a violent effort, as though he dreaded lest the lapse of another moment might weaken his resolution; "Be it so—to the Gemoniæ with the traitor!" The guards seizing Silius, hurried him away to death.

A violent burst of grief succeeded the command, and, feeble from the excess of emotion, he descended the tribunal. Narcissus, approaching him, whispered—"the sword of justice must be double-edged; the crime is unavenged while *one* survives."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BANQUET.

THERE is a calmness and dignity in the last moments of those who *contemplated* the approach of death, among the ancients, which seems to have passed away with their creed. In Tacitus we find Pætus Thræsea calmly occupied among his friends discoursing on philosophy and a future existence, while in momentary expectation of the imperial mandate for his death. There was a sublimity of feeling, almost amounting to a conscious immortality, in wishing to witness the sky and the glories of nature in the hour of death. It was as though that solemn hour brought a consciousness of something within kindred to beauty and eternity, and in the sun and the cloudless sky they had a foretaste of the brightness of Elysium.

Messalina, hopeless of pardon, had already withdrawn to the gardens of Lucullus. In the hour of grief and approaching death, her mother Lepida, and her own children were her only companions.

Claudius and Narcissus returned to the palace. The memory of the scene he had recently witnessed in the camp, seemed to have passed away with the command he had issued for death; and, strange and inconsistent the passages of human life! while Messalina was shuddering at her probable doom, which every passing moment invested with more horrid reality, Claudius was seated at the banquet board, indulging plentifully in wine. On the same couch reclined the three favourites of his reign. The middle place, esteemed the most honorable among the Romans, was occupied by Pallas—above him, and next to Claudius, was Narcissus—Pallas raising himself on his couch, whispered Narcissus—"Mark," he said, "he drinks deeply—

wine, while it lends oblivion to wrong, will unnerve also for revenge."

"Leave it to me," rejoined the other, in an under tone, "I have ruled him hitherto, and shall not relinquish sway till I have accomplished all." While he yet spake, a messenger presented a letter to Claudius. The eyes of Narcissus were fixed on him as he read.

"From the empress," said Claudius, with an infirm voice.

"If his tenderness return," muttered Narcissus, "she escapes my toils."

"She implores for life," continued Claudius, gazing earnestly on the letter.

"Let her first," replied Narcissus boldly, "repair the honor she has sported with." The eyes of Claudius and Narcissus mutually encountered, and, as with shame, the former declined his head upon the letter.

"Let* the unhappy woman be informed," said Claudius, addressing his freedman, "that to-morrow she shall be admitted to her defence.—" as he spoke he rose from the table, followed by Pallas and Callistus, and left the chamber.

"No defence to-morrow!" muttered Narcissus, surveying the apartment, and finding himself alone, he started from his couch—"To-morrow, adulteress, shall not be for *thee* to speak—pale and silent shall be thy lip, ere morning—Ha!—ha! thou shalt meet thy Silius soon. "Well met Evodus," he said, as leaving the apartment, the freedman addressed passed the door.—"Bear with thee this ring as thy commission—the emperor hath even now left the hall in anger and resentment—his orders were the death of Messalina—hie thee to the gardens of Lucullus; take with thee the tribune on duty, and see that execution be done—this is thy warrant—away."

* The original expression in Tacitus.

CHAPTER IX.

THE GARDENS.

ON the cold bare ground lay the empress of Rome with her children—by her side lay her mother, supporting her wretched daughter's head on her bosom.—That bosom, alas ! which once glowed with the pride, and beat with the yearnings of a mother's care, was now the only pillow crime and wretchedness had left the daughter. Absence may weaken the ties of friendship, calumny estrange the heart of our friend, and time impair its truth ; but nature, the alpha and omega of life, the same through reproach, caprice, or accident, indissoluble in her bonds, unfailling in her strength, unabating in her warmth, glows in the mother's heart, by the bed of death, as when first she clasped her infant to her breast, still as brightly and unchangeably as the lamp in Vesta's temple.

" And thinkest thou not, my mother, he will answer me ?" said Messalina, raising her tear-dimmed eyes, " oh !" she continued, observing her mother's silence, and seeking comfort in *her own* reply, with that delusive hope, with which we turn to our own heart, when love and friendship fear to answer us—" Oh ! he ever loved me—it cannot be now that he would wish me dead." Lepida was unable to speak ; but, with tenderness, parting the flowing hair from the brow of Messalina, she stooped and kissed it. On the ear of childhood, ever attuned to the sounds of mirth, the word " dead" fell with a gloomy and saddening power, which seemed to cut it off forever from its world of brightness, and of love. They had exhausted every childish art of condolence and endearment ; Messalina, notwithstanding, wept with that bitterness of grief, which, like the childless despair of the Jewish Niobè, " would not be comforted." They wept with her—they besought—they spoke a thousand hopes, which, like reeds, bent beneath the weight of sorrow which trusted them—they knelt—they embraced her—the stream of

nature flowed from mother and children ; but innocence was corrupted as she mingled with the waters of crime.

"Speak—speak, mother," said the wretched woman, clasping Lepida's hand in her own, and bathing it in her tears—"speak—if I be to die, let not nature desert me in the last sad moments—why should the lip, which hath so often pressed me fondly, be silent now, when most I need its comfort ? Mother," she continued, looking steadfastly in Lepida's face, "when thou standest by thy daughter's pile, let not her ashes, like those devoted to Tartarus, be scattered to the winds ; I would have them, mother, placed in an urn by thine own hand ; and hallowed by thy tears and prayers." She bent her head on the knee of Lepida, and wept. "And must I part," she said, after a pause, slowly rising and gazing on the sky ; "must I part from that bright and beautiful heaven, and that glorious sunlight, whose spirit spreads light and joy, making the sky like our own Elysium."

"My daughter," replied Lepida, "even *there* alone rests thy hope—look not for pardon ; the silence of thy husband speaks thy doom—thou must now regard life as a wilderness, whose parched and arid soil is watered by our tears ; whose barrenness gives not growth, save to our cares and sorrows—raise thine eye now to that bright Elysium, the abode of gods, of heroes, and of poets—even to that place, whose waters flow in the radiance of a cloudless sun, whose air is sweet with unfading flowers, and vocal with the melody of immortal song."

"Is there then no hope ?" exclaimed Messalina, clasping her hands with violence to her bosom.

"Trust it not, my daughter," replied Lepida, her voice acquiring strength from that very resolution, which dared to look upon the worst ; "the time draws nigh, and to indulge in hope, is only to give sharpness to the blow, which ends thy pain—to wait the executioner, were ignoble, when thou hast thyself the means of shunning this disgrace—here," she continued, drawing a poignard from her bosom, and presenting it to Messalina,

"Here is the weapon thou so much darest, which gives thee liberty—let not men say, "the empress fell by an *hireling's* hand." Messalina timidly received the poignard, and with a trembling hand deposited it in her bosom—she started, as she heard the garden-gate open, and instinctively raising her hand to the dagger, stood with a petrified silence, as her eyes fell on the advancing form of Evodus, accompanied by the tribune—on the instant she fell on her knees, and, grovelling at her mother's feet, she besought her love—her pity—her protection.

"Save thyself, child," said Lepida, nature betraying itself in the tremor of her voice, "the dagger."—Messalina snatched it from her bosom, and with fear and hesitation, applied it at one moment to her throat, the next to her breast—but with the horrors of death returned the love of life—her hand became unnerved and trembling, the poignard dropped from it; and Messalina, rushing to her mother, buried her face in her bosom.

"My mother—my mother—" exclaimed Britannicus, clinging with one hand to Messalina, while the other was held in supplication to the stern visage of the tribune—"Do not kill my mother."

"Away boy," exclaimed the soldier, rudely tearing him from his hold, "if thou wouldst not share thy mother's doom." Evodus as harshly separated the weeping Octavia from her wretched mother.—It was but one blow, and Messalina fell senseless from the arm which clasped her.

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The pile was already extinguished, and its expiring embers soaked with wine. The mother had not forgotten the last injunctions of her daughter.—In the very garden, which witnessed her death, her children and her mother knelt and wept upon the urn of Messalina.

THE CHRISTIANS.

A PASSAGE FROM THE REIGN OF NERO.

“They were put to death with exquisite cruelty, and to their sufferings Nero added mockery and derision.”—*Annals of Tacitus*.

CHAPTER I.

THE CONSPIRATORS.

IN a small apartment, strongly guarded by some of their own adherents, sate a small band of those, whom detestation of the tyrant and designs for vengeance had combined in a common cause. Humanity shuddered at the atrocities, perpetrated in the moments of whim and levity, and the minds of virtuous men were not less revolted at the crimes than the character of an emperor, whose chief delight was the blood of his people. Contempt formed also no slight ingredient in their revenge. A monarch who compromised the dignity of his throne for the humble distinctions of “a coachman and comedian,” and who in his own person degraded the majesty of the empire he represented, by collision with the lowest classes, had claim neither to the respect nor allegiance of his subjects. The reins of government were each day relaxed in authority, when its chief magistrate degenerated into a mere night brawler, masked for the purpose of enjoying his debauchery and excess with im-

punity. Yet there were many who flattered the vices of the tyrant, and dignified his follies with the name of talent, because they dreaded his frown ; nor even did the senate hesitate to pass decrees of servile adulation, extolling a son for the murder of his own mother, and proclaiming the anniversary of her birth-day as unhallowed in the calendar. But in that corrupt body there was one left (Pætus Thræsea) in whom the sense of virtue and natural feeling was sufficiently strong to restrain praise on such an occasion ; and whose independence, in abandoning his seat, only marked him for the future vengeance of the emperor, and formed an ingredient in his subsequent accusation.

“The conspirators,” says Tacitus, “painted forth in glowing colors all his atrocious deeds, by which the empire was brought to the brink of ruin ; they urged the necessity of choosing a successor equal to the task of restoring a distressed and tottering state.”

The author of the present conspiracy was Caius Piso, whose noble birth derived additional lustre from his talents, which were uniformly employed in behalf of his suffering country.

At the head of the table, surrounded by several Roman knights, stood Piso ; and on his right hand, Fenius Rufus, commander of the prætorian guards, whose integrity as a public officer had ensured the respect of the army and people. A single lamp illuminated the apartment, whose dim light gave an air of sternness to the visages of the group. Aware of the dangerous occasion for which they were assembled, and the vengeance which awaited them in case of discovery, each man stood with his sword drawn. Amid the various designs proposed for the downfall of the tyrant, each was anxious to arrogate to himself the glory of a deed which would end the sufferings and degradation of his country.

“Why should we not,” exclaimed Subrius Flavius, “strike the tyrant and avenge the honor of our country at the very moment he insults it ? Even while in the garb of a comedian he

courts the applause of his people—a blow struck at such a period will disclose its own motive.”

“Were it not better,” said another, “that he should fall in his midnight frolics; to fire the palace, and in the confusion to dispatch him?”

The acquiescence in the last design was unanimous. There was only one objection to it: the *safety to themselves* which must accompany its completion. As men sworn to the arduous enterprise of rescuing their country, they were willing to hazard their lives, and deemed the cause consecrated by the very dangers to which it exposed them.

“No!” exclaimed Piso, “let the blow be struck before the assembled people. Let them see, though they may patiently wear the chains *a player* has laid on them, that Rome has not forgotten her Brutus, and that his spirit has not ended with his age. Flavius hath spoken rightly—the moment of his fall should be while he insults his country and degrades the purple; let us also regard the majesty of the throne, insulted by the abandoned appetites of its prince, and stained with the blood of matricide. We have regarded his cruelties with too much indifference, and his vices with too much pardon; but it is time the sword should be unsheathed against himself, and those very vices be made the instruments of his death. Let us not wanton with the time in meditation, which should be devoted to action. A purpose like ours may cool by delay, and needs to be kindled by promptitude and decision. Each new day discloses a murder perpetrated in the moment of whim or midnight revelry. Poetry and philosophy wither in the poisonous atmosphere of his throne, and the deaths of a Seneca and Lucan may yet be necessary to propitiate the monster and appease his thirst for blood. But when he is insensible to the ties of nature, why should he feel the influence of those more distant? Perhaps even now while we deliberate, the fate of some one of us may hang in the scale, and his name may already stand on the roll of proscription.”

As Piso concluded, every hand more closely grasped its hilt, while the frown and the compressed lip, denoted the sternness of resolve. A general murmur of approbation ran through the conspirators, which subsided in the sentiments which originated it. Like men intent upon the same end, each proposed a different means for its accomplishment. Some, in whom the sense of personal safety predominated, advocated private assassination; while others, by the publicity of the act, exhibited their utter recklessness of life in the vengeance which was sure to follow. The more pusillanimous proposed not only that the blow should be dealt by Piso's hand, but even during the hour of hospitality. But the heart of the conspirator was not so blunted to honorable principle as to accede to that proposal.

"What!" he exclaimed, "stain my household gods and dishonor my table with the blood of my prince! No; those who strike for their country should do it in the full gaze of her children. If we fall in the attempt, we fall not like cowards, afraid to proclaim their act, but before the gaze of thousands who shall fire their children with the tale."

Immediately opposite to Piso stood a man who had hitherto remained in silence; his arms were crossed on his breast, and one hand was concealed within the fold of his robe. From the tenor of his life, hitherto dissolute and effeminate, but little valor or stability of purpose was anticipated by his confederates. His features delicately moulded, and habitually mild in their expression, gave but slight indication of the resolution or hostility of a conspirator. What was their astonishment, when the soft and voluptuous Scævius plucked from his bosom a dagger, claiming the honor and danger of the blow.

"Romans!" he exclaimed, "look on this dagger!—'tis sworn to liberty! I wear it for a tyrant. I have taken it from the temple of Fortune, and invoked the blessing of that goddess on our enterprise. For liberty I wear it, and none shall forestall me in the blow. For me, I care not if I fall, but let the eyes of Rome be on me. Let the place then be the Circus

while he celebrates the games of Ceres. Let the hour of festivity be that of death, and the groans of the dying be echoed by the exulting shouts of his people. I have carried this weapon on my person consecrated to freedom, and have sworn not to part with it till the task be accomplished."

There was a dead silence throughout the assembly, as they gazed, not more in admiration than wonder, at the change which circumstances had wrought in the disposition of the voluptuary. Scævius advanced to the centre of the apartment, and motioned the conspirators to his side. They surrounded him. He pressed the dagger to his lips, each following his example; and as he consecrated it to "Jupiter Vindex," each touched the hilt, and bound himself to "*Death or Freedom!*"

CHAPTER II.

THE CHRISTIANS.

"AND is it true, my Claudius, as thou hast told me, that there is but one God?"

"Even so, Tita—a God who regards thee with the love of a father. A God who, in his own being, embraces the power which thy faith hath divided among many. One, perfect as He is powerful, who looks on human sin only to forgive; whose altars stream not with the blood of beasts, but whose only sacrifice is the incense of a pure and contrite heart."

"Yet," continued the maiden, fearful to abandon her early faith, and almost persuaded to be a Christian, "hath not that faith a loftier beauty, which shows us a presiding power in all things, and diffuses the glory of divinity through every object, whether it be the soft and sunshine stream, or the flower that grows upon its bank!"

"Even so, my Tita, every object hath a god to thee. Thy faith, like the halo which circles the brow of thy Olympian,

who hath declared His reward and punishment, or the idol of thy creed, whose very altars are even now trembling before the weak and despised followers of the Cross."

Tita was silent; her hands were locked, and her eyes were turned to that heaven where rest the hope and reward of the Christian. Claudius wept with gratitude, as his ardent hope construed the motion of her lip into prayer.

"Speak, Tita," he said after a pause, "and let me hear thee say, thou art a Christian."

"I will worship thy God," replied the maiden, "but who will teach me to pray?"

"Thou shalt this night," he replied, "become one of His children. Thou shalt pray among His servants, and be baptized. The rites of our faith are poor and humble, even as He who preached it; nor altars have we, nor costly sacrifice. Its priests are the persecuted Christians, but the faith we follow is rich in the promises of eternity. Come with me, then, maiden, and the hymn of praise we sing shall be echoed by angels, who joy in the repentance of a sinner."

CHAPTER III.

THE ASSEMBLY.

THE Christians of whom Claudius spoke, were that night assembled within the walls of a prison. Paul, the apostle, had been seized by order of the emperor, and was appointed to die. Day and night his cell was filled with those who had been trained by his teaching and example, and the patience and fortitude which supported his last moments illustrated the faith he taught.

The apartment in which they met was a small cell connected with the prison. Rude, bare, and desolate, it was the last house of the apostle of Him "who had not where to lay his Head."

At the head of the apartment stood a rudely-carved cross, which the fearless zeal of the Christians had conveyed within the walls of a Roman prison. His followers knew not the moment the emperor might order his execution, and each night was spent in the prison of their pastor, hearing his instructions in the articles of their faith.

As Claudius and Tita approached the cell, the voices of the Christians engaged in worship, reached them. Their hymn may be rendered thus :

Rejoice ! the clouds of death are burst,
A living ray hath pierced the gloom
Of man's benighted soul ; and now,
Pale death no longer sways the tomb.

Yet 'twas no arm of fleshly might,
No sword of earthly power, which won
The Christians' triumph o'er the grave—
'Twas Jesus ! God's incarnate Son.

Thro' Him redeem'd, the soul forgets
The sin which stain'd its nature here ;
And, wash'd in His atoning blood,
Ne'er sheds again the burning tear.

Rejoice ! The Christians' promis'd land
Her gates of light hath open'd wide ;
What pilgrim fears dark Jordan's stream,
When Jesus standeth by his side ?

Raise high the voice of pray'r and praise,
As Israel, when they pass'd the flood :
The Christians' staff is Jesus' name,
Their covenant the Saviour's blood.

What ! tho' a tyrant's frown be on us ?
Tho' tortures twine his earthly rod ?
The Christian trembles not, for faith
Reveals the mercies of his God.

“Thine must be a blessed faith,” said the maiden, as she paused and listened, “which lends to the persecuted spirit repose even amid the horrors of a prison.” The sign being ans-

wered from within, the door was opened, and the Christians stood in the presence of the apostle.

Claudius was in a moment at the feet of Paul, and the tear which fell upon the hand of his teacher, evinced the sorrow and affection of the disciple. "Rise, rise, my child," said Paul. "If we part, 'tis but for a season, and in the body; while our spirits, free from the weapon of the enemy, rise to the God who gave them. Weep not then for me, but rather rejoice that the persecutor of God's church hath been called to support it, and testify to the truth of a faith he disbelieved."

"Rejoice with *me*, father," said Claudius, rising and approaching Tita. He removed the mantle in which she had been disguised. "I have led one more from the errors of a false creed to the fold of Christ. Bless and receive her."

The apostle approached, and laid his hand on her head, while the assembly kneeling, fervently repeated the blessing he asked upon her conversion. "Welcome, welcome, my daughter, to our blessed faith," said Paul rising from prayer; "thou art now one of those whom the arm of the flesh is raised to smite to the earth; but be of good hope and fear not, for ours is a creed in which life, its joys and tears, are even as the mists of the morning; while the future, for which they prepare us, shines with the strength and brightness of the sun. Then fear not, maiden; the hand of the strong may triumph over the body, and the very trials we endure below but make us fitter for the perfect company of heaven." The apostle paused, and as he steadfastly gazed on a young and beautiful girl devoting herself to a creed whose adherents were then the victims of unparalleled cruelty, the tears fell quickly, and his voice faltered with emotion. "My daughter thou art now surrounded by enemies, who may doom thee to the cross, or the horrors of the arena; but fear not." His voice became more indistinct, as his mind reverted to the death which awaited him. "The moments I have yet to number are but few; a tyrant is my judge, and his will is my punishment; yet I would see thee many times in

this humble place of worship, and endeavor to seal thy faith by the words of a dying man." His head sank upon her bosom, and as she felt his tears, her first prayer to the God of the Christian was breathed for the deliverance of His apostle.

The last echo of their hymn had scarcely died through the prison, when distant shouts mingled with cries of horror and supplication to the gods, were heard approaching, and gleams of fire flashed through the grating of the cell. "It is the hand of God," exclaimed the Christians. "He hath come to the rescue of his servant."

"It is a fearful flame," said the apostle, "but whatever it bodeh, as servants to the faith, we must bow to the will of God."

Still brighter grew the flames, and more tumultuous the clamors without. The assembly prostrated themselves before the cross; Tita clung to Claudius, and firmly repeated the prayer he offered up for protection, while the apostle, as one whose heart was unaffected by the dangers or accidents of life, stood in an attitude of composure, his arms folded on his breast, while at intervals he responded to the accents of prayer which breathed around him.

Footsteps were heard rapidly approaching, and the cry, "Seize the Nazarenes," echoed through the prison. The words smote on the hearts of the assembly, and confirmed to their excited fancies the horrors of their doom and the persecution of the tyrant. "Be of good courage," said the apostle, with calmness, "the hand of God is over us." The words were no sooner uttered, than a band of the prætorian guards, headed by Fenius Rufus, rushed into the cell.

In the consternation of the moment, the Christians forgot the admonitions of Paul, and turning to the soldiers, cried with one voice, "Mercy, mercy."

"Dogs!" retorted the guards, as seizing, they bound Tita and Claudius, scoffs and reproaches embittering the roughness

of their manner. "Call on thy God," said one, "if He can, He ought to save thee."

"They have forsaken Jupiter," exclaimed another; "may his lightnings wither them."

A soldier approaching Paul with bonds, the apostle extended his hands. "I am ready, yet unworthy," he said, "to bear chains and persecution for the name of the Lord Jesus."

"Who is *thy* God?" asked the soldier, sneeringly.

"Even He," replied Paul, "who can change thy reviling into worship."

While these things were passing, Tita and Claudius being bound, had been separated. Rufus, the conspirator, friendly to the Christians, and performing an unwilling duty in their seizure, approached Claudius, and whispering quickly, "Have a good heart. On the kalends the tyrant dies, and thou shalt be free."

"God forbid," replied Claudius, "that blood should purchase my freedom. Why should *I* fear the death a *God* hath died?" Claudius was seized and placed in an adjoining cell.

CHAPTER IV.

THE BANQUET.

TORN from a faith she had but lately embraced, and from the presence of her young instructor, Tita was conducted by the guards to the presence of the emperor. The conflagration which some have imputed to Nero—upon the ground that he wished to build a new city, and assign to it his own name, and the odium of which he in turn affixed to the Christians—was raging around them with violence, and they with difficulty thriddled the narrow streets. The air was rent with the lamentations of those who were compelled to look, without a sin-

gle hope, on the destruction of property and home. So rapid had been the advance of the flames, that wealth or household-possessions were disregarded amid the general peril of life, and the endeavor to save it by flight. The young conducted the aged, and the impotent and diseased trusted to the support of the healthy. As each gazed upon the smouldering ruins of their homes, with the instinctive feeling of nature in the hour of sorrow and desolation, he implored the protection of a superior power, and betook himself to the temple of his god.

Though Tita had not remained long in the assembly, the humility of the Christians, their fervor in prayer, and above all, the calm and sublime deportment of the apostle had already given growth to the seeds of faith which his words had sown in her heart. As she hurried through the streets, she endeavored to abstract her mind from the horrors of the scene, and close her ears to the bitter wailings which seemed to echo the triumph of the flames. She called to mind the prayer which Claudius had taught her, and as far as memory aided her, invoked the God of her new faith. At the very moment the prayer was on her lips, they passed the temple of Jupiter Stator. The flames had made fearful ravages on the edifice, eddying like the waves of a fiery sea through the broken arches, and around the solitary columns, that stood like gods of a false religion gazing on the havoc they could not prevent nor avert. Priest and worshipper knelt in solemn prayer before the crumbling shrine, the embroidered robes of the former giving a ghastly reflection to the flames, which derided the power of their god and sported with their religion.

As they passed the temple, a strong glare of light disclosed the altar and a golden statue of Jupiter. At the same moment, as by a lightning-stroke the statue fell from its pedestal. The crash gave a fearful echo through the surrounding space, and a surge of fire and sparks rose as from the tomb of the dethroned god.

Recently emancipated from the errors of a superstitious

faith, her heart was still prone to omen. The Christian assembly, the resignation of Paul's manner when he alluded to his approaching death, and the calmness which seemed to mark *him* alone amid the consternation which surrounded him, all rushed to her mind, confirming the truth of her faith; and as she saw the downfall of the statue to which *she* had once knelt, the last tie of her ancient creed seemed to be broken, and "The God of the Christians be *my God*," burst from her lips.

That night the tyrant banqueted amid the sufferings of his people, and the desolation of their homes.

In the apartment, to whose luxury fancy as well as wealth contributed, sate the guests. The ceiling was painted a dark azure, to represent the firmament at night, while the thousand stars that glittered on its surface were of solid gold. The walls were hung in gold and silver cloth, in which jewels were so dexterously wrought as to represent mythological devices. Seats of solid silver frames surrounded the apartment, and at regular intervals were placed lamps, whose scented oil emitted a rich and intoxicating odor. The spaces were filled with marble statues of poets and orators.

Around the board loaded with the dishes of epicurean fancy, livers and brains of pheasants, tongues of peacocks and nightingales, sate the guests, crowned with garlands, while the soft and voluptuous music was dismally contrasted by the groans and shouting without. At the head of the table stood the emperor's chair of solid ivory, inwrought with gold. It was vacant. By its side stood a similar one, in which sate his mistress, Acté, an enfranchised Asiatic slave, to whose noble birth several men of consular rank had been suborned by Nero to swear.

Notwithstanding the cruelty of a disposition which knew no remorse, and sensuality which never felt satiety, a taste for music and dramatic exhibitions formed a prominent trait in Nero's character. He was so ambitious of applause, that when he appeared upon the stage he disposed an armed force

throughout the theatre, for the purpose of extorting approbation which better judgment withheld: and on one occasion the future emperor Vespasian had well nigh lost his life for daring to sleep during the performances of the royal actor.

On the present night, while his city was crumbling to ashes around him, and his people left houseless and shelterless, the tyrant exhibited a fearful levity in his conduct. He had arrayed himself in the fanciful costume of Orestes—one of his favorite parts—and before he left the apartment, had been rehearsing a scene with Paris, a parasite and an actor, to the delight of his guests, whose silence or censure would have marked them for his hatred.

He rushed into the apartment followed by Paris; in his hand he carried a small lyre. His face was flushed with wine, heightened by the exciting scene on which he had been gazing, and as he raised a full goblet to his lips, he exclaimed in a tone of savage mirth, "By the gods, it is a glorious sight! burn, burn, Rome, ay, to thy very last stone. The flames of Troy flashed not more brightly to the avenging Greek. Pluto and his minions are abroad to-night. Drink, drink, sirs, to the havoc of the flames."

It was well understood that Nero had been the cause of the conflagration, for during its progress, incendiaries with torches and combustibles were stationed throughout the city, declaring they acted by authority.

The guests, one and all, rose, fearing to dispute his will, and pledged the ghastly toast in wine, which they wished were poison to the tyrant. A dread silence prevailed through the apartments as they laid down their goblets, but the pale, compressed lips and the stern brow, which but ill repressed its frown, attested the feelings which lurked beneath a gay convivial demeanor, "And thou, my fair Helen," he said, turning to Actè, and pressing her hand to his lips, "by Jupiter, thy beauty might destroy a second Troy. The bride of Menelaus was not fairer. Psha," he continued, bursting into a loud

laugh, "why do I mention the dotard's name? Thou wilt not be false to me, my Actè?"

At that moment Rufus entered the apartment, and approaching Nero, whispered, "She is here."

"Bravely done, by Jupiter," returned the monarch. "'Tis a night of triumph to me. Rome in ashes, and a mistress won! But the Nazarene?"

"Is in prison," replied Rufus.

"There let him rot," returned Nero, "cursed dog! Is it not sufficient he hath won her love? must he also corrupt her faith? Drink, drink, my Rufus, thou hast been faithful to me." The soldier raised the goblet, and in silence drank the death of the tyrant. "Bring her before me, good Rufus; I would see *her* in my power I have so long worshipped. Meherc'le! but her presence will give zest to our banquet. Bring her before me, and mark me, guard her well." He approached the soldier nearer, and whispered, "Let not Actè have access to her." The soldier bowed and withdrew.

Tita immediately entered accompanied by Rufus and a few of the prætorians. Her face was declined on her breast, and completely shaded by the luxuriant hair whose curls clustered round it. Nero flung aside his lyre, and clasping his hands gazed on her in rapture, a sensual smile beaming in his eye, and playing in the curve of his lips. He rushed forward and fell at her feet. He seized her hand, and looking on her, passionately exclaimed, "Tita, I have loved thee long; smile on me, maiden; my throne shall be thine." The maiden moved not, nor answered.

A cry of surprise bursting from the guests as they rose from their seats, rang through the banquet-hall. "The empress! the empress!" was echoed by all. Nero turned, and beheld them pointing to her chair. It was empty. Actè had left the chamber. In a moment of intoxication he had been betrayed into inconsistency, and had ordered Tita before him while Actè was present.

CHAPTER V.

THE CELL.

WE left Claudius in the cell adjoining that of the apostle. The suddenness of his seizure sufficiently disclosed to him the certainty of his doom, and the implacable will on which his life depended. He, however, enjoyed the privilege of daily intercourse with Paul, and from the contemplation of his example, and the inspired beauty of his instructions which contrasted the utter futility of life with the glorious prospect of the future, derived a holy strength which fortified him against every pain to which he should be exposed.

"Master," he said, "it is my will to die with thee."

"Say not so, my son," returned Paul. "Not *thine*, but the will of God be done. It matters not how nor when we die. Let but our last moments be full of assurance to God, and faith to His Son, and the sufferings we endure below shall be exchanged for that happiness the world cannot give. We part here but for a moment, my son; our meeting shall be eternal, and our joy shall no man take away."

Such were the exhortations of the apostle to confirm his faith and diminish attachment to life, whose tenure at best was precarious.

His desire was at length granted; the execution of Paul and Claudius was appointed for the night before the kalends. The period at once revived to the memory of the Christian the words of Rufus, "that the kalends should see the tyrant dead." He shuddered at the death even of his enemy, and actuated by the tenets of a religion which forbids retaliation for injury or the entertainment of vindictive feeling, he not only freely forgave the emperor, but desired, if possible, to save his life. The kalends were approaching, and he himself was to die the night before. If he could absolve his conscience from privy

to bloodshed, he was content to die. There was one other reflection which embittered his approaching fate, and taxed all the powers of submission. He had not seen Tita since their violent separation, and she had been torn from him at the moment when her conversion to the true faith had consecrated their love. Nor was their separation more painful than the uncertainty of their next meeting. In this, however, he derived consolation from that beautiful portion of his faith, which taught him that the future re-united the broken ties of life, and purified affection from the senses which controlled it here; that the tear with which we parted would be exchanged for the smile, and the suffering and broken-hearted forget the pain which dimmed the eye and bowed the head.

The night preceding the kalends had at length arrived. He was appointed to die after the apostle, and yet no opportunity had offered of divulging the conspiracy, and so acquitting his conscience from the secret which weighed on his last moments. He heard the tumult of the soldiers without as they prepared for the execution; and he stood momentarily expecting their entrance to conduct him to the place. As he thus stood, his last moments occupied in prayer, in which he implored a blessing upon Tita, the door of his cell opened, and the object of his thoughts and prayers was before him.

"Welcome, welcome, my Tita," he exclaimed, "even though it be in the hour of death. But why weepest thou, girl?" he continued, as clasping her to his breast he felt her convulsive sobs.

"Ask me not," she replied. "Thou art to die; the faith thou hast bound me to must be sealed with blood. Oh! my Claudius, was it for this I abandoned a creed which withholds not its protecting power from the humblest object on the earth?—Yet, for thy sake, will I love it still, seeing it has not left thee comfortless or without support."

"Comfortless?" retorted Claudius, his eye beaming with that light which hope and truth had borrowed from a purer world.—

"Comfortless! I tell thee, Tita, the dungeon of my pain hath for me neither darkness nor chains. Its solitude gives me the holier companionship of those thoughts which dwell within the Christian's breast; its fetters press lightly on my hands when I think on the glorious liberation of the spirit from all that is unholy and corrupt. Remember, maiden, that I told thee of—that we must pass through fear and tribulation ere the tainted soul can appear before God. The saint is content to pass through suffering here for the promise which awaits him beyond Jordan. Thou said'st rightly, Tita, I am not comfortless, for the last words of our Divine Master, were, 'I will not leave ye wholly comfortless.' Canst thou doubt, my Tita, the care of our God, while Rome itself is in ashes, not one flame hath touched the prison of his servants?"

"And I," replied the maiden, "have seen Jupiter Stator hurled to the earth. But," she continued with increased agitation of manner, "our converse must be brief, for the hour approaches. Guarded by Fenius Rufus, it is by his permission I am here. His last words were 'The palace hath dangers for thee; return not.' I flew to thee, for I heard this night thou wert to die, and if I could not perish, at least to receive thy blessing, and pray with thee."

On a sudden, the lateness of the hour and the conspiracy rushed to the mind of Claudius. His conscience shrank from the possession of its guilty secret, and on its disclosure hung the life of his enemy.

"Bear with me, Tita," he exclaimed hastily, "I must see the emperor before I die. I have a secret which concerns his life and the safety of his throne. That disclosed, I die happy.—The Christian forgives where he is persecuted, returning good for evil. The entrance to the prison is guarded; I could not pass in my own garment. Lend me thy mantle. I will return ere the hour of death arrives." Their raiment was immediately exchanged.

"Remember," said Tita, "I came to die with thee."

"Ere that hour I shall be here," replied Claudius.

"The God of our faith preserve thee," ejaculated the maiden, as the door of the cell shut Claudius from her view.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TYRANT'S MIDNIGHT.

HAVING passed the guards in safety, he flung the disguise from him as he approached the palace. Entering its gardens, he desired to see Epaphroditus, the emperor's freedman. With the narrow bigotry of an hostile faith, he distrusted the Christian, and doubted any intelligence he might convey. At length, after some importunity, his request was granted. "The emperor is sleeping," said the freedman. "When he awakes you shall be admitted to him."

It was midnight ere Claudius entered the palace; but the sleep Epaphroditus spoke of, was a broken and fearful dream. The tyrant tossed upon his couch, in vain seeking for that repose whose dreams were mingled with the images of guilt.—By his side stood the spirit of his mother, which haunted the matricide in the hour of conviviality not less than in the solitude of his chamber. But the darkness of midnight, whose silence was eloquent with the horrors of his guilt, lent to his dreams the tortures of a coward and excited fancy. 'Twas then Agrippina rose to his mind, and as he shuddered at the imprecations of his murdered mother, the air resounded with the whips, and the gloom of his chamber blazed with the torches of the furies who followed her. He writhed upon his couch, his teeth gnashed, the fevered drops stood on his aching brow as the imaginary presence of the juries typified the retribution which awaited him after death. The mimic part of Orestes he so frequently played, rose before him, stained with maternal blood, bound with serpents, goaded by lashes, and

trembling beneath the curses of the wandering shade. "Conscience," says Tacitus, "may make a truce with the guilty, but never a lasting peace." By day or night, waking or sleeping, the shade of Agrippina, with other victims of his cruelty, stood before him. His dreams were those of "the crook backed tyrant," aggravated by matricide.

"Back, back to thy Hades, accursed shade," exclaimed the tyrant, seizing his sword, and convulsively starting from his couch, "back, back, I say. Comest thou for blood or vengeance, my time is not yet." His eyes glared, and the fingers of one hand distended with terror, as with the other he thrust at the imaginary spectre. "Ha! ha!" he exclaimed with a forced laugh, whose echo made him start as it rolled through the vacant chamber. "What is it I fear? Darkness—solitude—myself? It is, it is, myself. My thoughts which burn night and day. Ha! who's there?"

"The slave of Cæsar," said Epaphroditus, entering, "of him who rules the mistress of the world," he continued, bending the knee with the servility of an eastern slave. "A Nazerene without craves an audience with thee. His request, he says, must not be slighted."

"A Nazerene?" reiterated the tyrant, "what doth he here? and at midnight? Perhaps," he continued, musing, "he comes to beg the life of his brother Paul. But no; blood, blood, will I have," he said, convulsively grasping his sword. "Why should I, who have slain a mother, fear the death of a Nazerene?" His face grew ghastly, the sword fell on the ground, and as its echo smote on his ear, he flew to his freedman, and buried his face in his bosom. "Shield me from them; they haunt, they lash me. Oh! my Epaphroditus, would that my pile were lit." His athletic frame trembled in the embrace of his servant, till weak and stupified with the horrors of his guilt, he sank at his feet.

"Speak, speak, Cæsar," said the freedman kneeling, and part-

ing from his swollen temples the hair clotted with perspiration.

"Speak ; shall I admit him ?"

"Not till *they* are gone," said Nero, endeavoring to rise.

"Who?" said Epaphroditus, looking round the apartment dimly lit by a single silver lamp.

"*My mother!*" exclaimed the matricide, in a tone of agony, which appalled his attendant. The tears flowed freely, but they were the offspring of a coward mind which trembled at the images it evoked from the sepulchre of its guilt. They flowed on the cheek, but melted not the heart, either to pity or repentance. He dashed them aside, and looking hastily round, sprang from the ground as in disdain of the abject position he occupied at the foot of his slave. "Admit the Nazarene," he said ; and, after a pause, feeling the cowardice of guilt, and approaching Epaphroditus, and eyeing him strenly, "have guard upon thy life ; if there be treachery here, thou diest ; keep thyself within call, and leave thy sword with me." The freedman obeyed and withdrew. The eyes of Nero followed him, as though he would scan his purpose. His sword was in his hand.

Claudius and the freedman entered after a few moments ; on a signal from the emperor, the latter withdrew.

"What wouldst thou, Nazarene?" said Nero, hastily.

Claudius stood at the remote end of the apartment, his face and figure in perfect obscurity. "My task is one of mercy," said Claudius. "Thy life and throne are even now in the power of a despised Nazarene."

"My life!" reiterated Nero, as the word sounded with the voice of retribution. "My life ! and in thy hands ! *Fool ! on thy life sport not.*"

"Death is not a theme for sport," returned Claudius ; "the lamb gambols not before the wolf."

"Ha ! dost bait me to my face?"

"Not *I*," replied the Christian, "but thy *conscience.*" The

tyrant started, and his sword fell. "Thou art even now in my power," continued the Christian, "yet would I not strike thee though the sword were in my grasp. The Christian blesses even the enemy that curses." Nero trembled as well before the sublime doctrine of a faith he persecuted, as the dignity of its disciple. "Thou tremblest," said Claudius.

"'Tis with rage," replied the tyrant.

"The Christian," continued the Nazarene, "trembles before God alone."

"Out on thee, fool," shouted Nero, rage and terror heightening his voice to a shriek. "By Jupiter, thou and thy faith shall be swept from Rome."

"*Man* dare not do what God forbids," retorted Claudius, his eye glowing, and his lip curling with disdain at the impotence of a monarch who mistook defiance for power. The sublime sternness of the Christian awed the tyrant, and subdued his menacing tone.

"Christian," he said, after a pause, "what of my *life*?"

"It is in danger," retorted Claudius. "The dagger is unsheathed for thy destruction, even while I speak." A visible tremor ran through the tyrant, and tottering to his couch, he sank upon it. "Cæsar," said Claudius, withdrawing, "my task is done. My last words, if they have not blessed, have saved thee. We meet no more till we stand before God."

The emperor saw not the sublime action of the Christian, as his uplifted hands seemed to attest the truth of his dying words, but the hollow voice in which they were uttered, pierced the very heart of the guilty wretch. "Man or shade, be thou what thou wilt," he exclaimed, rising from his couch, and extending both hands to him in the agony of fear, "beest thou to warn or haunt me, I adjure thee by our gods, tell me all thou knowest."

"To-morrow shall be celebrated the games of Ceres," replied Claudius; "then and there meet the conspirators for thy life."

"Yet one word more," exclaimed Nero, rushing forward, and

in the coward weakness of the moment, falling on his knees
The chamber echoed his words. The Christian was gone.

CHAPTER VII.

THE CROSS.

MIDWAY between the palace and prison, stood the place appointed for the execution of Paul and Claudius. It was past midnight as he cleared the palace-gates. As he proceeded with haste, a dark and shadowy body approached. A low and stifled lamentation swept on the night-blast, and the light of a few straggling torches shed a melancholy and sickly glare. It moved at a slow and measured pace, and it was not till the moment of their meeting, that he recognized it as the funeral procession of the apostle.

Stupified with horror as he looked his last on all that was God-like in nature, he forgot alike the errand he had been engaged in, or the maiden he had left in his own prison. His mind was abstracted from every thing earthly, and its powers were suspended between love for his master, and prayer for his last moments. As he gazed on the apostle sublime and erect, his hands bound as a malefactor, and folded on his breast, his eyes turned in prayer to that God for whose name persecution had no terror, and punishment no pain ; as he heard him repeat with vigor and distinctness that model of all prayers, his Divine Master had taught his disciples ; as he gazed on, and heard him, the beautiful conformity of example and precept rushed to his mind, and the teaching of *Paul* never so strongly influenced his mind, as the faith, the courage and sublimity of the *Martyr*.

As Claudius turned to join the procession, the eye of the Apostle fell upon him. "My son," he said, "have I not well told thee that life is but a shadow. Even as now the words of

man can erase it. Remember, then, the words of the dying, which speak as from the oracle of the grave, and with the frown of an Omniscient Judge before them. Fear not, I say, ever as our Master hath taught us, those who hurt the body, but cannot touch the soul; but rather fear *Him* who can destroy both soul and body together." He raised his fettered hands to heaven, and bowed his head as he mentioned the name of God, and the tear which dimmed the eye of Paul, fell like dew on the heart of that young disciple, quickening the growth of that faith his words had planted there.

Through that long night Claudius stirred not from the foot of the cross where hung the lifeless body of his master. The hours rolled on, the sentries were relieved from their posts, but the external world and its objects were clouded from him, as he knelt absorbed in prayer. The torches had already sunk in darkness, and the drowsy sentinel reclined upon his spear. No sound was heard on that desolate spot, save the prayer of the Christian, and the groan of anguish which escaped him as his eye occasionally glanced upon the cross. But round that martyred apostle hovered the halo of Divinity, brightening the hopes of the disciple with the light it borrowed from eternity.

The night was on the wane, and the stars were gradually fading before the misty light of morning, and Claudius still remained praying by the cross. So deep and abstracted had been that prayer, that he heard neither the word passed by the sentinel, nor the dull and heavy tramp of armed men approaching. The first words which broke his reverie, were rudely addressed him by a soldier. "Rise, Nazarene; seek a fitter place for prayer."

Claudius started from the ground. The whole had been a dream. He looked upwards. The pale form of the apostle met his gaze. He clasped his hands convulsively to his eyes. He looked round him; the night had already passed, and the dim light of morning faintly streaked the east. Tita, and the danger in which he had left her, rushed through his mind with

the speed of lightning. "Had the maiden braved death for the love she bore him? Had *he* shrunk from the death whose triumph and glory he painted to her?" were questions which passed through his confused and bewildered mind. As he mused upon her danger, he was about to rush from the spot, when one of the soldiers held a torch to his face, and recognizing, seized him.

"Ha! Nazarene, is this thy faith," he exclaimed, tauntingly, "to leave a *girl* to die in thy place!"

"Unhand me," cried Claudius, vainly endeavoring to extricate himself from the grasp of the soldier. "I fly to her rescue and to death."

"*She is here*," cried a female voice from the centre of the troop, and flinging from her a mantle she had found in Claudius' cell, the speaker disclosed the form of Tita. In a moment he burst from the hold of the soldier, and clasped the maiden to his heart.

"Was it thy will, my Tita," he exclaimed, "to die for me? So young, so beautiful; was life as nought to thee?"

"I have been wedded to thy faith," answered the maiden, "in sorrow and in suffering. Thou hast told me that life is a dream to the Christian, and heaven his reward. Thou saidst in that heaven we forget the smile which sense corrupted, and the enjoyments which fade beneath the hand which touches them. The martyrs of our faith, who regard life as an offering to God, thou hast said, will be our company;" and as she spoke she extended her hand to the lifeless form which hung upon the cross. "Claudius, I am a Christian, and for that faith would I die. Thine hour had come; they entered thy cell; I disguised myself with thy mantle, and was content to seek in *thy* heaven the happiness the Christian could not find on earth."

"Seize him, seize him, a Christian hath deceived the emperor," echoed the soldiers. "To the palace," they shouted; "the wild beasts shall devour what the cross has spared."

They were rushing forward to seize Claudius, when Tita, releasing herself from his embrace, flew to the foot of the cross, and on her knees, clasping it with one arm, while the other was extended to the guards, "Hold," she exclaimed; "the God of the Christian will protect his servant."

A few sultry drops of rain which had hitherto fallen, portended an approaching storm. The clouds rolled on in a heavy and sable mass, while anon their broken edges glowed with the lurid rays of summer-lightning. A peal rang through the heavens, whose hollow reverberation quivered the cross to which Tita clung. The phenomenon of appeal and answer, addressed itself to the superstition of the heathens, and for a moment they were as those who hear in the thunder the voice of God. Motionless and silent they stood fixed to the spot till the clouds dispersed, and the echoing thunder had died in distance. But with the storm passed its terrors, and seizing the Christians they conducted them to the palace.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE TYRANT A JUDGE.

It was the noon of the following day, ere the Christians appeared before Nero. The games in honor of Ceres had been celebrated, and Claudius had defeated the conspiracy, and spared the life of his persecutor. The conspirators had been seized, and their punishment already awarded. As Claudius and Tita were entering the chamber of the emperor, several of them were departing, strongly guarded and in chains. The eye of Rufus fell on Claudius. "Christian," he said, "I pardon the faith which errs on the side of mercy. Thou hast spared a tyrant's life; 'tis well if it sting not thine own." The conspirators passed on, and the Christians stood before the emperor.

Epaphroditus who stood by his throne, in brief detailed the complaints of the soldiers, viz. "That Claudius had endeavored to escape death by passing his prison-door in female disguise, and that the imposition had not been discovered till they arrived at the place of execution."

Claudius answered not a word; he was unwilling to desecrate the benevolence of his faith by making it the purchase of his pardon. He *had* left his prison, but it was to save his enemy. Death to him was more welcome than life; and he stood before the tyrant resolved to keep the secret of the last night's interview. The darkness of the chamber, and the agitation of Nero had so far concealed the Christian as to prevent his recognition now.

"Ha! Nazarene," he cried with rage, his eyes full and flashing, "by the gods thou hast broken thy cage once, but I will bind thee where freedom shall only give thee to beasts." Nero was not more exasperated at *his* alleged escape, than that of Tita from the palace, and the love of the Christians which presented an obstacle to his own lust. Turning to Tita, and with difficulty moderating the passion he could not conceal; "and thou, too, maiden, hast sported with our power within our very palace. Have a care: the lion is strongest in his own den. This was the act of Rufus, but he and his confederates are in chains. Thy guard shall be trustier." He whispered Epaphroditus. The maiden looked not up; if she had; the malignant smile on the tyrant's lip would have quenched the last ray of hope.

CHAPTER IX.

THE MISTRESS AND THE CHRISTIAN.

THE Christians were separated, but their destinations were as opposite in place as character. Claudius had but exchanged one dungeon for another, while Tita was conducted to an apartment costly and luxurious. But what is splendor to the heart-sick and unhappy prisoner? It resembles the golden bars of the cage to the bird; they catch the rays of that sun whose heaven was freedom, and whose broad expanse gave no limit to its flight; and now its wing flutters only to remind it of bondage, and the melancholy of its notes pines for the mountain and the breeze.

None were permitted to approach her save the freedman, whose life was to answer the violation of his charge. She foresaw the tyrant's design, and anxiously prayed for the hand of death to avert it. She flung herself on the couch in despair, but the form of Claudius stood by her side, and whispered words of comfort and support. He seemed to exhort the earnestness of prayer, and confidence in the protection of his God. She rose from her couch, and endeavored to abstract her mind in prayer. She was strengthened; her feelings were tranquillized, and she sank to sleep.

It was midnight; the lamps but faintly lit the chamber, whose deep silence was broken only by the respiration of the sleeping maid. Slowly and cautiously a secret panel connected with the silver cloth of the apartment, was opened and speedily closed. A delicate female figure approached, whose dark countenance and flowing hair announced an eastern clime. It was Actè. The emperor had left his apartment that night, and free from suspicion, she had passed to the chamber of her rival. She had not forgotten the passion he had exhibited to Tita in the hour of a drunken revel, and jealousy, deeper for

the protraction of revenge, still rankled within her breast. She loved Nero, tyrant and monster as he was, the more so, perhaps, as he had continued the connexion in spite of the remonstrance and dissuasion of his mother; and the warm passions of her climate, while they lent ardour to her love, gave depth also to revenge.

She cautiously surveyed the chamber, and stood in silence as if to ascertain that none approached. In her hand she held a small golden cup. She approached the couch. She bent over the unconscious form of her victim, but the calmness of sleep was on her brow, and with it, it brought forgetfulness of danger. She touched her. Tita started from her couch. "Claudius, is it thou?" broke from her lips, as she looked round her wildly, unconscious of time or place.

Acté extended the cup to her. Guilt and fear for its success worked within her; her hand trembled, her lips quivered in the attempt to speak, and as she faltered, "Drink, maiden, 'tis a draught for care," she sank exhausted by the couch of Tita. Suspicion darted through the mind of the maiden as she recognized guilt in the nervous hesitation of Acté's manner; she dashed from her the goblet, and as her scream of terror rang through the apartment, the door opened, and the freedman rushed in; he disappeared for a moment, but immediately returned, followed by Nero and Claudius.

To explain their sudden appearance, it is necessary to retrace a few steps.

The enmity which Nero felt to the Christians, had been embittered in the case of Claudius by the love which bound him to Tita. As long as he lived the tyrant could not hope for the possession of her person; he therefore resolved upon his immediate death under pretext of his creed.

That night he had entered his cell, and had announced to Claudius his fate. To the Christian death had no terror, and amid the cruelties which Nero's ingenuity had in sport de-

vised for his victims, Claudius' fortitude remained unshaken.

"Grant me but one request," said the Christian.

"Speak," rejoined the tyrant.

"I bow in silence to thy will," answered Claudius, "if I but see Tita ere I die."

"Follow me," replied Nero. They were already in the passage conducting to her chamber, when Epaphroditus, who watched at the door, hearing the scream, rushed in, followed by Nero and Cladius.

A dead silence prevailed, as Nero and the Christian gazed on the figures, unable to explain their agitation or its causes. Actè still clung to the couch for support; the goblet lay by her side, while Tita stood in the centre of the apartment, her hair falling in disorder on her shoulders, her eyes fixed in vacant unconsciousness, while her averted hand trembled as it pointed to Actè. To one whose palace witnessed as frequently scenes of death, as those of conviviality, the present one, as his eyes fell on the goblet, needed no interpretation for Nero.

"Poison, treachery," he cried, in a voice of passion.

Actè, mistress of every art which could assuage his fiercest moments, dreaded not his anger so much as his discovery. She felt concealment vain, and with the subtlety of a mistress who knows the weakness of her lover will forgive a fault which originates from the depth of love, falling at Nero's feet, implored pardon. "Forgive me," she cried, I share thy throne, but cannot share thine heart with another. My lord knows the depth of that love which hath made me aim at the life of this maiden. Pardon, Cæsar, for thy servant."

Though guilty, the intense emotion of her utterance evinced her truth; and as the emperor gazed on his kneeling mistress, the sincerity of her words, the strength of her passion, the tears which dimmed her lustrous eyes, and the grace of her attitude, all flung around the Asiatic a spell which even the bonds of love had never known, and the sweetness of that voice reclaimed the sway which momentary rage had discarded. The heart

of the tyrant was too callous to the sense of crime, to reprehend it in others, and the cunning of his mistress had touched the right chord in the heart of the sensualist when she palliated crime by passion.

From that moment Nero relinquished his design upon Tita, but resolved at least that the pleasure of blood should expiate their frustration. "Christians," he said, turning to Claudius, "ye have met for the last time. Epaphroditus, my guard." The freedman withdrew, and entered in a few moments accompanied by some soldiers. Claudius was remanded to his cell, but as he gazed on Tita, the faint smile that beamed through his sad expression, was borrowed from the hope that their meeting above would know no separation.

CHAPTER X.

THE CHRISTIANS' TRIAL.

THE threat of the tyrant was soon to be realized; and the faith of the Christians to be tested by resignation to their death. Nero, ever anxious to convert the tortures of his victims to his own entertainment, resolved that the hour of their execution should be during the night, and the manner of it by fire. He appointed—as was his custom when a Christian was to die—his gardens to be fitted for the occasion, and a throne to be erected for himself and Actè.

At the appointed hour the gardens of the palace were illuminated, the pile surrounded by faggots was prepared for the martyrs, and before it, at a short distance, stood the throne of him, who regarded the agonies of death as lightly as the mimic sports of the stage. A slow and solemn flourish of trumpets announced the approach of the procession. The monarch and his mistress were already on their throne.

Preceded and followed by a numerous guard, the Christians

drew nigh. Claudius bore in his hand a small crucifix, which, in the intervals of prayer, he fervently pressed to his lips, while the strength and submission he implored in the name of Him who had died for all, were audibly responded to by Tita.

They were already at the stake; two of the guards advancing, had bound them to the pile, and were on the point of firing it, when the exclamation "Hold," from Nero, suspended their further progress. The eyes of all were turned to the throne. The emperor held a scroll; his hands trembled while he read it, till rage and disappointment struggling within him, he tore and trampled it. It had been handed to one of the guards surrounding the throne, and the bearer had disappeared ere Nero received it. It ran as follows :

"The Christian about to die hath saved thy life, but wills not to make that service the price of his freedom. It is true that by so doing, he hath divulged and defeated our design. We forgive an act which sprang from the gentleness of his faith. Think not, that, though *some* of us are in chains, there are not *others* ready to avenge the manes of thy victims, and redress their wronged and violated country. The dagger yet remains unsheathed, and the sons of Rome curse the life of the tyrant. If Claudius and Tita perish, *Nero dies*.
A CONSPIRATOR."

The tyrant looked on the crumbled fragments at his feet, as though ashamed that threats should change his purpose, or cheat him of his feast of blood. He vainly endeavored to laugh away his fears; but it was vain as his mind reverted to the dangers from which he had been rescued. The tyrant is constitutionally a coward, and suspicion generates those cruelties from others which have been inflicted by himself. Terror prevailed, but cunning forgot not to enhance the pardon as the gift of generosity. "Release the Christian," he exclaimed, "he hath saved my life." He descended the throne with the Asiatic, unwilling, as it were, to remain on the spot where mercy had supplanted vengeance.

The Christians had tasted "the bitterness of death" in its anticipation. The reprieve called them back to a world whose

hopes and interests they had forgotten in the change which awaited them, and while they wept with gratitude for their pardon, faith still turned their hearts to the future as a home "not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."

SABINA POPPÆA.

A PASSAGE FROM THE REIGN OF NERO.

"With all my heart I hate thee."
Richard III.

CHAPTER I.

THE PANDER.

THE sun's last ray had streaked the east, and evening was casting her shades around the palace of the tyrant. In an antechamber, overlooking the palace-gardens, and connected with them by a sloping terrace, was Nero. The impatient rapidity of his gait, as he paced it to and fro, and the anxiety with which he looked through the increasing gloom, evidenced his desire for the arrival of some one, or the receipt of some intelligence. As he walked, he muttered to himself, contemptuously, "Fool! to tell me of his love—knew he not I was powerful in my will, and reckless as to the means of its fulfilment? Seated at my board day after day, her beauty and accomplishments have ever been the theme. Dotard! the words which kindled curiosity, inflamed passion." He stopped for a moment and rushing to the door, which opened on the gardens, bent his ear to catch some approaching sound. "Not yet, not

yet," he continued, turning away with impatience; "no tidings from her yet. I marvel, Tigellinus, but thou shalt miss thy sesterces." He resumed his pace through the chamber, and with it the thread of his soliloquy. "Otho, thou hast been prodigal and luxurious, and like a Paris hast thou stolen thy fair Helen from another; but thou shalt find thy king is not to be outdone. Victor in the circus and on the stage, I need but one more laurel for my brow; the conquest of Sabina Poppæa. Fool! thou hast wantoned for the last time." He was interrupted by the arrival of the expected messenger.

"How now, good Tigellinus? Hast thou prospered in thy suit?" asked Nero, hurriedly; forgetting the evil of his designs in the pleasure of success.

"The servant of Cæsar has done his will," replied the pander, bending his knee to the ground.

"Rise, rise, trusty fellow," said Nero, "and tell me all. The purse is not lost that wins a mistress." And as he spoke, he thrust it into his minion's hand.

"It was difficult," said Tigellinus, "to gain access to one, whose hours are occupied with knights and gallants. However I framed a tale of urgency, and was admitted to her presence. The *command* you gave me for an interview," continued the man, with the air of one experienced in matters of intrigue, "I changed to a *request*, for vanity would comply with the entreaty of a king, where pride would rebel against command."

"Thou hast judged rightly, fellow," answered Nero, as he hung intently on the words of his messenger. "What said she to that?"

"What could she say," replied the man, as a smile struggled through his grim and guilt-worn features, "but accede to the proposals of a prince, whose accomplishments have won the praise of all." As he spoke he cast a furtive glance on Nero, to see if the flattery were well-timed to one whose vanity had frequently led him to degrade his own person, and the empire he ruled. Observing a smile of satisfaction on Nero's counte-

nance, he proceeded. "This very night she has appointed the meeting at her own villa; Otho sups with some dissolute companions, and she will be alone."

"Thanks, thanks, good fellow," cried Nero, as he strode the apartment in rapture. "Thou hast exceeded even the hopes of a lover." He stopped short as though some obstacle had occurred to mar success, and subdue his rapture. "Otho, Otho," he muttered, "how shall he be disposed of? Poison—the dagger." As the words gradually died on his lips, a convulsive shudder ran through his frame. The pander bent forward to catch the mutterings of the tyrant, and as he heard the instruments of death pronounced, like one whose heart had been seared in the service of guilt, his eyes glowed with a fearful and unnatural light.

"Spoke my lord of *death*?" asked the minion.

"Who heard me?" shouted Nero, starting as the word rang in his ears, like the echo of his own thoughts, "The very ground I tread on is vocal with the cry of blood." The guilty wretch clasped his hands to his forehead, as though to check the thoughts which goaded and stung him like the whips of the Furies. As memory opened and read her catalogue of crime, each one writ with the "pen of iron," and blazoned in fearful characters of blood, the tyrant trembled, and extending his hands to repel some terrific image, he muttered indistinctly, "Not blood! not blood! my very banquet-board is stained. The shade of Britannicus haunts me there."

The pander, anxious to dispel these fears, as their indulgence might interfere with his trade, and retard his advance in the imperial favor, moved cautiously to the side of the tyrant and whispered, while his keen malignant eye rested full on Nero,

"The poisoned lip never speaks." The emperor started as though an adder had stung him.

"My very slaves are parties in my guilt," he said to himself; he paused for a moment, as revolving devices for the removal of Otho. "Wouldst thou do it?" he inquired, suddenly turning on the pander.

"When Cæsar commands, Tigellinus obeys," rejoined the man obsequiously.

"Out on thee, slave," cried Nero, stamping in one of those ungovernable fits of passion, to which tyrants are subject when stumbling-blocks lie in the path of their guilt. "But for thee, and minions such as thou, conscience would be silent, and night would have no terrors. Crime never presents her poisoned chalice, but she hath ministers to distil her portion." The pander met his rebuke in silence, knowing that on the slightest opposition to Nero, the same fate would most probably befall himself, which he desired to mete to others. As his keen eye rested on the tyrant absorbed in his own thoughts, meditating the difficulties which marred his will and the possibility of their removal, the latter started from his reverie and clasp- ing his hands in rapture, exclaimed—

"Thank the gods! they have not deserted me yet!"

"The worshipper is not forgotten, who pours libations freely," rejoined the pander, with well-timed adulation.

"Peace," cried Nero, approaching him hastily, and speaking in a subdued tone. "It were not safe to seize the wife in the very gaze of the husband. He must away from Rome. His absence will not excite suspicion, and I fear to tamper too much with the patience of the rabble. I tell thee, when roused, they are a Hydra; and they would watch with greater joy the burning pile of their prince than the sacrifice consuming on the altar. We might send him to a province. Hold! Is not the prætor of Lusitania dead?" Tigellinus rejoined in the affirmative. "Yes," he continued, we will appoint him there. We will, as it were, hold him in displeasure, forbid his appearance in our train or within the walls of the palace." He paused for a moment, as in contemplation of his design. "Yet—the empress—Octavia," fell brokenly from his lips. The pander lost not a word, as the obstacle presented a chance for his hellish employment. He approached the tyrant and whispered in his ear—"Agrippina!"

"Owl!" shrieked Nero, as the daggers of his mother's assassins flashed before his eyes, "thy note is ever one of death. Repeat that tale again, and by Jupiter! thou shalt be torn asunder by wild horses." The wretch, poisoned as he was by the atmosphere of a murderer's palace, and habituated to scenes of horror, trembled as he saw the workings of passion, which might single himself as a victim. The manner of Nero, with the vacillation of one who shapes it to his ends, on the instant forsook its sternness. "Serve me in this, good fellow," he said, "and thou shalt name thine own reward. I tire of Octavia, even though she have Cæsar's blood, and is mine own kinswoman. Sabina must be empress. Ha! what say'st thou to that?" The pander bowed in silence. "I could divorce her—but mark thee, not without cause—I fear the people. Like children, they must be humored at the very moment we would chastise them. Come, work thy brains, fellow, I must have a pretext for divorce."

"Intrigue," rejoined the pander, with the readiness of one whose ingenuity was most fertile when catering for the tyrant's lust.

"Good," replied Nero, the brightness of his eye testifying satisfaction; "but—with whom?"

"Her slave."

"His name," hastily rejoined the Tyrant.

"Anicetus," answered the pander, doggedly, and fearful even to broach his name; "he hath served Cæsar, *once*." The individual named, was the assassin of Nero's mother.

"I pardon thee," said Nero, "for the readiness of thy wit. This night on my return from Sabina, have him within call of Octavia's chamber." Tigellinus bowed, and had scarcely withdrawn, when Nero distinctly heard the sound of footsteps within his chamber. Ever suspicious of some ambush for his life, his sword was instantly unsheathed. Turning towards the quarter whence the sound proceeded, he started on seeing the curtain move which concealed a door, communicating with

the empress' apartment. "Ho! who goes there?" he cried, in a tone subdued by fear. There was no answer. He advanced and raised the curtain. None lurked behind it.

CHAPTER II.

SABINA POPPEA.

THE moon and her "starry host" were bright in heaven, as Nero checked his horse before the villa of Otho. Accustomed to the midnight brawl, and collision with the lowest phases of human life, and aware of the perils to which they exposed him in case of discovery, disguise was no stranger to him. He tied his steed to a tree, and wrapping round him a mantle, whose folds concealed the splendor of the imperial robes, he advanced to the house.

Ascending the steps, he entered the hall. None met him.—Silence prevailed around, save the gentle murmur of the trees as it harmonized with the playing of a distant fountain. As he looked on the spacious hall, surrounded by marble statues, whose cold and spotless white pallidly reflected the moon which gleamed on them, he trembled as he seemed to stand in the company of the dead. He hurried onwards, and passing through an opposite entrance, descended a terrace opening into a spacious lawn intersected with walks, and ornamented with fountains whose waters sparkled in the moon-beam. The path he struck into, terminated in a white marble alcove, where faintly twinkled a solitary light through the vine-branches which encircled it. He advanced, and entering, beheld the object of his passion.

At the first interview, conscious of the rank of her paramour, and the high stake for which she played, she neglected no personal attraction, or winning grace of manner, to ensure her conquest over the heart of the voluptuary. Abandoned in cha-

racter, her libertinism was always subordinate to her interest, and where that lay her favors assuredly followed. Elegant in manner and person, and endowed with refined wit, her charms appealed equally to the eye as the intellect. Love had no share in her heart, where it clashed with interest. She had abandoned her former for her present husband Otho, who then enjoyed the emperor's favor. Her present lover was that emperor, and his addresses, while they flattered her vanity, excited the pride of success.

As he entered, Nero paused in rapture to gaze on her. She reclined on a silver couch, whose purple covering glittered with stars of gold. Her white robe, contrasted with the purple, developed the exquisite symmetry of her form. Her dark hair fell loosely on a neck which vied in whiteness with the marble which surrounded her.

As Nero entered, she rose rapidly from her couch, and with well-affected humility knelt, forgetting not the homage which gratifies a prince, even in his hour of familiarity.

"Nay, rise, lady," said Nero, extending one hand, while the other circled her waist. "If it be the captive's part to kneel, then what should I, whose heart and throne are even now at thy feet?"

"Thy *throne*! my lord," echoed Sabina, with that studied surprise, which by affecting ignorance of the emperor's designs, was only meant the more fully to develope them. "Alas!" she continued, "should I, the servant of Cæsar dare to aspire to a throne whose empress is of Cæsar's blood?"

"The hand which wove that tie," answered Nero with intience, "can dissolve it only to re-unite it in the person of one more lovely."

"Alas!" retorted Sabina playfully, "I fear me the same hand which broke one tie would not spare another."

"That tie," replied Nero, "shall endure as long as I sway the Roman sceptre. Think not, Sabina, I woo thee as a boy whose love is not of the heart, but tinged with the gay and

fickle colors of his day-dreams. Think not," he continued, pressing her hand to his lips and kneeling, "that like him, my love is the mere breath of a moment, like the wind, wandering from flower to flower, and treasuring the sweets it steals as it flies. No, Sabina, I love thee as *man* can only feel, who, like the tree, bends beneath the storm he cannot resist. For thee would I relinquish the diadem which binds the brow of the Cæsars, and end my days with thee in retirement such as this."

To one so ambitious in her aims, the proposed dereliction of the crown was by no means pleasing; having so strong a proof of his attachment, she resolved therefore to ensure the divorce of the empress, and base her advancement on injustice and usurpation. She saw the object of her ambition within her grasp, and, with dissimulation, feigned reluctance to seize it. She cunningly framed obstacles for their union, which she well knew would only accelerate success, by inflaming passion; and lastly, when the emperor had conquered objections as speedily as they were advanced, she professed extreme attachment to her husband. "Ask me not," she said, "my lord, to leave one whose every act and wish are but the fulfilment of mine. Bounteous even to prodigality—his life is a continued round of pleasure." She paused for a moment, and added in an under tone, "which rivals even the splendors of his prince." The comparison was opportune, and accomplished what she desired, viz: to effect an hostility between her husband and Nero. However Otho's fate had been already decided.

"Ha!" exclaimed the tyrant, with difficulty subduing the rage which burned within; "*my rival*! It shall not long be so. We will curtail his purse and train, since both are used to fling contempt upon his prince." Turning to Sabina, his hurried and indignant tones were quickly changed to an amatory softness. "Fairest, our love hath even outstripped objection, and our power removed it. Orders have been already taken for Otho."

Wanton as she was in character, and bent on her own welfare even through the ruin of others, she trembled in the embrace of the tyrant as she heard his ominous words. The deeds perpetrated by order of Nero throughout the city, were bruited in the mouths of all, and the ambitious beauty shuddered when she thought, that even while they were speaking, the imperial mandate had gone forth for his death. "What means my lord?" she inquired timidly.

"Fear not for him, Sabina," returned Nero, "we will appoint him to a province, thus will our loves be as secure as they are secret."

"But the empress?" urged Sabina.

"Shall be no longer so," rejoined Nero hastily. "The throne of Rome shall be filled by another, and Sabina shall be empress."

CHAPTER III.

OCTAVIA.

It was midnight ere the emperor dismounted at the palace. The fervor of his passion had blinded him to the arts of his ambitious favorite, and what he mistook for the promptings of love, were merely the suggestions of a spirit which aspired to the pride of sovereignty. The more he dwelt upon her charms, and the indifference of satiety he felt towards Octavia, the more confirmed was his resolution to wed the former, and divorce the latter.

As he entered the chamber, the empress lay on a couch in tears. "How now!" he cried, in a voice whose brutality half revealed his design; "in tears? Weep on. Ere long thou shalt have cause to weep."

"My lord, in what is my offence?" replied Octavia, in the convulsiveness of grief. "Have I not been to thee loving and

faithful? Have I not regarded the sanctity of thy person, and the honor of thy throne? Flows not in my veins the Cæsars' blood? Have I done aught to deserve this of thee?"

Nero regarded her with a stern and malignant frown. "You do not please me," he said, in a tone which blended indifference with irony.

"Oh! my lord," cried the wretched woman, rushing to his feet, "say not that I displease thee, or that my love for thee is nought. Rather would I that my pile were lit, than meet that frown which awes tenderness, or hear the sternness of those words which gives hope and love the chill of despair. My lord—my lord, let me hear thee say I am still thy queen."

He flung from him with a rude disdain the hand which had seized his own in the ardor of entreaty. "Away!" he cried, "thou art no longer queen. Why should the majesty of the sceptre be defiled by one who denies not her smiles to slaves? Faithless and corrupt, thou hast dishonored me and broken thy compact with the people."

"'Tis false!" exclaimed Octavia starting to her feet, her majesty of mien and the innocence of fame lending eloquence to her words. "'Tis false—false as the tongue that framed it. Better," she continued, "that the poison which removed my sire and brother had been prepared for me also, than thus to live slandered in mine honor, and despised in my love."

The tyrant started as she unexpectedly revived the memory of the murders of Claudius and Britannicus. The allusion only gave ferocity to his manner. "Traitor!" he cried, "on thy life we charge thee silence. Add not reproach to faithlessness." He stamped with violence, and shouting, "Ho! without there!" The pander, accompanied by Anicetus, entered.

"Now the gods preserve me!" ejaculated Octavia, as she sank upon the couch.

A quick and significant glance passed between the tyrant and

his minions, as the former pointed to the empress. "You confess?" said Nero, in an audible voice.

"I do," replied the other firmly.

"Hearest thou that, my queen?" exclaimed Nero with dissembled indignation. "Now by the gods!" he continued, "if such crimes be not punished, Rome herself shall soon become an Augean stall, which even an Hercules cannot cleanse. Hearst thou that, and hast thou not a word to silence thine accuser?"

A long silence succeeded the question, and so perfectly motionless was Octavia, that she seemed to have swooned beneath the magnitude and falsehood of the charge. "She denies it not. Leave us!" said Nero to his minions.

"Not till they have heard the words of their empress," said Octavia, rising with a dignity and collectedness of manner which contrasted strongly with her previous excitement; "not till they have heard the daughter of Claudius, true, as she is slandered, repel the charge they are *sworn* to maintain."

"Ha!" cried Nero, "wilt thou add falsehood to faithlessness?"

"Not I, but *thou*, my lord," she said, approaching Nero with a coolness which almost daunted his purpose. "*Thou* who addest falsehood to calumny; *thou* who forgettest, in the ardor of thy passions, the dignity of thy sceptre, *and the compact with thy people*; *thou* who insultest the Cæsars' blood by raising a plebeian to the throne; *thou* who slanderest thy queen by thy desire for Sabina."

"Ha! who told thee so?" asked Nero, his lip white and quivering at the dread of discovery, and the probable defeat it boded to his designs.

"There is a guardian power around the throne," replied Octavia mildly, "which protects the sceptre, even though the monarch sleep, or wanton in the hour of unguarded mirth. A power which spreads its Ægis to guard it from pollution, or the shaft of treachery. Such was the power which this night led

me to the door of thy chamber, and revealed to me in secret the plans thou hast laid to slander me, and the perjury with which thou seekest to support them."

"Traitor! another word, and thou diest!" shouted Nero, drawing his sword and presenting it to her bosom.

"Strike!" exclaimed Octavia, falling on her knees and baring her breast to the blow. "Strike! and thou addest one more victim to the pile of sire and son!" The sword fell from the tyrant's hand.

CHAPTER IV.

INNOCENCE AND CRIME.

THE will of a tyrant is absolute, when the national council connives at guilt, and their flattery changes vice into virtue. The crimes of the emperor were regarded by the senate only as opportunities for decrees of adulation, and sacrifices to the gods; while the semblance of honor and virtue which marked their proceedings, were calculated to deceive a people insulted by that body, and oppressed by their monarch. The empress was banished to Campania under a military guard, and a proclamation issued stating the charge and justifying the severity of the measure. Otho had unsuspectingly obeyed the commands of his emperor, and was already in Lusitania. The tyrant had accomplished his designs with impunity, and Sabina Poppæa was empress.

Who is he who watches by that sleeping infant with a care and tenderness which speak it an only one? Tears for the first time moisten that stern and furrowed cheek, as he parts from its fevered brow the silken hair, and gazes on the hectic stain of death. Its deep and gentle breathings come like voices from the world of its dreams, and as he watches the playful

smile upon the lip which death shall ere long seal for ever, its innocence, "trumpet-tongued," rebukes the guilt of its sire. As he looks upon that child, and deems it a pilgrim, bound on a bright and sunny journey, one, for whose innocence death has no terrors, but rather comes to release from pain, how retraces he the past, and weeps and trembles as its slumber speaks of thoughts which are imaged in its smile? As he looks upon that deepening stain, and hears its fevered breathing, the more fervently does he clasp its fairy hand, and press its lips, as loth to lose the only tie which binds him to its own bright world.

"Augusta!" exclaimed the tyrant, in tones of sorrow to which his voice had long been a stranger. "Augusta! the gods preserve thee, my child! Let not mankind say, the gods spared not the babe of him who knew no throb of mercy for others!"

He flung himself frantically beside the child—he pressed it to his heart, and lavished upon it kisses. It was vain; he heard a convulsive respiration; he felt it beat against his own heart; he gazed on its face—the paleness of death had succeeded the hectic of disease.

Augusta was the offspring of Nero's union with Sabina Poppæa. Nothing could exceed the general joy of the people, and the adulation of the senate. Votive offerings were made to the gods, for Sabina's safety; days of supplication were appointed, temples were erected to those gods whose tutelage her situation required, athletic sports were instituted, and golden statues erected on the throne of Jupiter Capitolinus to the goddess of fortune.

But neither joy nor flattery could avert the infant's doom. A curse rested on the marriage-rite of its mother, and the short space of four months witnessed the dissolution of a child whose birth had caused such general exultation. But even the solemn array of death could not wake the degenerate senate to sobriety of thought, or dispel that strain of flattery which hung

like a charm around their decree's and public addresses. The deceased infant was canonized as a goddess, and a temple decreed to her worship with an altar, a bed of honor, and a priest.

CHAPTER V.

SABINA'S FATE.

THE popular odium and discontent which had been so long suppressed upon the divorce of Octavia, burst forth at length with a degree of energy which spurned the anger of the tyrant, and made him tremble on his throne. Their clamors for the recall of the empress from banishment were loud and fearless, and the apprehensions of Nero acquiesced in a measure, sanctioned neither by affection nor repentance. The expression of public sentiment assumed the anarchy of revolution. Some rushed to the capitol, supplicating the favor of the gods upon Octavia, while others in a tumultuous body beset the gates of the palace. The statues of Poppæa were dashed to the ground as objects of indignity and insult, while those of Octavia, wreathed with flowers and borne on the shoulders of the mob, were placed in the forum and the temples. Military force was requisite for the restoration of order, and at the point of the sword, the statues of Poppæa were rescued from their insulters, and once more erected.

While these things were passing without, not less turbulent were the scenes within the palace. The feelings to which Octavia had fallen a victim, were now commencing to operate against Sabina, and as she heard the shouting without, and the clamors of the populace, still echoing the cry, "The empress—Io! honor to Octavia. Down with the statues of Sabina!" They seemed the signals for her downfall, and the knell to her ambition.

Nor was the tyrant less perplexed, as he stood, uncertain

how to act, divided between rage and terror. "Ha! wanton," he exclaimed, rudely thrusting her from him "it is thou and thine accursed spell have wrought this! Ay, hearest thou that shouting?" he continued, as she sank trembling on her knees; "well mayest thou tremble. 'Tis well if they do not seize and tear thee from that very throne thou hast ascended by thy vile arts.

"I do not now contend for the honor of the nuptial rite, even though thou hast avowed me thine empress. *Life* is all the boon I crave. Save me, my lord, from the vengeance of Octavia's followers."

"Save thyself," shouted Nero, deridingly; "he who has willingly sought the precipice, must retreat ere the earth crumble beneath his foot."

"Nay, taunt me not, my lord," she replied, while her hands were locked in earnestness, and the clamors of the people were heard in the pauses of her entreaty. "My ambition was not greater than my love. I loved not the *emperor*, but *Cæsar*. Let not, then, that love turn to accusation and reproach. I ask thy pardon and protection. Should Octavia return and show herself to the people—"

"Sorceress," cried Nero, interrupting her, "I tell thee she is on her way even now. Think'st thou I *dare* oppose that monster, whose yells and groans are denouncing thee for vengeance. Ah!" he continued in a tone in which sorrow struggled with passion; "the gods have indeed marked me for their anger. The people rebellious to the throne—not slaves but kings. And thou, my child, my Augusta, whose death I have watched with eyes that never wept before. Away with tears! they wound, even while they soothe."

"Then by that child," cried Sabina, seizing his hand as he passed her, "whose memory is canonized in our own hearts, and who sits among those gods who guard Rome and her emperor; I adjure thee, despise not the mother. Shut not thine

ear against her prayer, but think that even in that mother's voice, thou hearest the entreaties of her child."

"Unhand me, traitress!" cried Nero, vainly endeavoring to extricate himself from her grasp, "or by the gods I smite thee to my feet."

"Not till thou hast promised me thy pardon," answered Sabina. "Speak, speak my lord, pardon and save me!" He struggled to disentangle his hand. She rose from her knees, and in the agony of fear and grief was about to fling herself on his breast, when a blow from the tyrant laid her at his feet.

"Gods!" he exclaimed, as he heard the heavy and lifeless fall, but feared to look on the momentary work of rage, "spare me not in your vengeance! Even where I stand blast *me* with your lightnings! So let the deed be yours, not mine."

A dreadful yell from without answered the invocation. "Away with Sabina! Down with her statues to the dust again! Io! Octavia! Io! Octavia!" While these shouts of vengeance, which the tyrant himself had unconsciously anticipated, were still ringing in his ears, as he stood in stupor by the body of Sabina, the door of the apartment burst open, and Tigellinus rushed in.

"The empress—" he cried.

"Is—?" rejoined Nero, starting from his reverie.

"*In Rome*," answered the pander. "The people surround her chariot with acclamations, and the Capitol resounds with their prayers."

"The gods must be appeased," said Nero. "Away, thou to the temple of Saturn.* Tell them to disburse bribes to the soldiery. If *they* stand firm, Rome is safe." He pointed to the lifeless form of Sabina, and rushed from the apartment.

* The treasury was in this temple.

CHAPTER VI.

THE AUGUR,

It was a dark and stormy night, as Nero, terrified by the return of Octavia, and haunted by the death of Sabina, left the palace for the college of the Augurs. So great was their influence on Roman superstition, that no affair of moment was undertaken without consulting them, and no event, involving public interest, could happen without demanding through them an interpretation of the will of the gods as to its probable result. Superstitious beyond others, from the very excess of his crimes which threw a gloom over the future, the coincidence of Octavia's return, the deaths of Sabina and her child, and the rebellious clamors of the people, all conspired to strengthen that feeling through the very fear which trembled at futurity.

"Hast thou done my bidding, Spurina?" asked the tyrant, trembling, as he entered.

The man whom he addressed, was one whose dignity and dress were calculated to add solemnity to his office, and inspire the superstitious with awe. His robe, or *trabea* of scarlet striped with purple, and embroidered with cabalistical characters inwrought with gold, hung loosely round a figure tall and athletic; his cap was high and conical, interwoven with the same augural emblems, while his beard, long and flowing, lent a sacerdotal dignity to his appearance. In his right hand he bore the *lituus*, or augural staff, used in the observation of the heavens.

"The book of Fate we would open," replied the augur, "is dark with fear and omen. Ha! hearest thou that peal? Speaks not the Olympian, in that fearful echo, his wrath and displeasure?"

The thunder died sullenly in the distance, and a death-like

silence reigned throughout the chamber. In terror the tyrant clasped his hands, and extending them to Spurina, exclaimed:

"Can the gods be appeased?"

"I know not, my son," replied the augur. "Their will is dark, even as the heavens which reveal its signs to mortals. Thrice this night have I essayed divination, even through the blackness of the tempest, and marked out the *templum*, and turning to the east, have awaited the omen that would give safety to thy throne. But it was vain; the lightnings flashed brightly for a moment, and left the heavens in darkness. Yet, while I looked, I saw a sign which betokened the approach of a stranger, one whom thou hast wronged, and who returns for the purpose of vengeance."

"Vengeance!" reiterated the tyrant, shuddering at the mention of an instrument he had so frequently employed against others.

"Even so," replied the augur. "The sign portended an unsheathed sword."

"The will of the gods be done!" ejaculated Nero. "Wifeless—childless! can vengeance strike more deeply?"

"Wifeless?" rejoined Spurina.

"Sabina is at rest," replied Nero, "and by my hand."

As he spoke, a fearful flash illuminated the apartment, and the building trembled with the reverberation of the thunder.

"'Tis a fearful night," replied Spurina, "and speaks of crime. Comest thou thus with unclean hands to ask the will of the gods, or raise the veil of the future? Away! away! Let not thine altars need sacrifice or incense. Propitiate the gods thou hast insulted, if yet they may hear and pardon thee."

CHAPTER VII.

THE DEAD AND LIVING.

NOTWITHSTANDING the brutality which resulted in the death of Sabina, it was asserted that Nero was violently attached to her. A difference of opinion prevailed as to the method of her death; some imputing it to poison, (an instrument of frequent use in his court) and others to a blow he gave her in a moment of passion. He resolved, however, to obliterate the memory of cruelty by the attachment he exhibited during her obsequies, delivering in person her funeral panegyric; "while," says an ancient author, "all Arabia did not produce in one year as much myrrh and frankincense as was consumed at the funeral of Poppæa." Contrary to the general custom, she was embalmed after the fashion of the east, and her remains consigned to the monument of the Julian family. Strange inconsistency of her murderer! After her death, a temple was erected to her memory, bearing the inscription—"To Sabina, the goddess Venus."

The funeral procession was characterized by all the pomp worthy of the rank of the deceased, and the attachment the emperor professed towards her. Boys and virgins preceded it, strewing flowers in its path, chaunting the praises and beauty of Sabina, and perfuming the air with the incense they scattered from censers. Descended from ancestors of rank, one of whom had been honored with a triumph, their statues were borne before the bier, which was immediately followed by Nero, his hands folded on his breast, and his appearance indicative of sorrow and dejection.

At the entrance to the monument the bier was lowered, and the emperor pronounced the funeral oration, in which he eulogized her beauty, virtues, and accomplishments, but above all, expatiated on the honor of being the mother of a child which was then enrolled among the gods.

The lustration with pure water from an olive branch was

concluded, and they were about to enter the tomb, when the forebost fell back as a voice issued from it. "Hold!" it cried. The attendants retreated as though it had been a voice from the dead, when Otho rushed from the monument.

It was a moment of terror to the tyrant, as his eyes met those of the betrayed husband. His guilt borrowed a deeper dye from the superstition which witnessed in the return of Otho the fulfilment of the augur's words—"A stranger approaches," while the sword which glittered in his hand, denoted the purpose of revenge.

"What dost thou here?" muttered Nero, trembling at the enraged expression of Otho.

"What dost *thou* here?" retorted the stranger. "Methought thy bounty was a proof of favor, not the purchase of dishonor. Makest thou thy power thus the pander to thy lusts? tyrant, she whom I left a *wife*, lies now polluted as a *mistress*. Away with the honors thou conferrest in mockery on the dead, when thou hast defiled their memory and name.

"Whence hast thou thy secret?" said Nero, looking round in terror as he beheld the surprise of the guards subside into pity.

"The empress," rejoined Otho, "thy wronged and honored queen; she, who was too weak to avenge her own insult, and the perjury thou called'st to support it; she who overheard thy plan for her ruin, and my dishonor, had pity for the injured husband to speak the secret."

"Away with him!" exclaimed Nero, in one of those violent transports of rage which so often sealed the doom of those he hated or envied.

"The dead must first be avenged," exclaimed Otho, rushing upon him. The blow was intercepted by the spear of a soldier, and the sword struck from his hand. He was seized, and in prison awaited the pleasure of the tyrant.

The empress Octavia was afterwards banished to the island of Pandataria, and beheaded by order of Nero. Otho was shortly after crowned emperor.

BRITANNICUS.

A PASSAGE FROM THE REIGN OF NERO.

"The potent poison quite o'ergrows my spirit."
Hamlet.

CHAPTER I.

MOTHER AND SON.

"PALLAS is going to abdicate," remarked the emperor, in a tone of pleasantry, to some members of his court, as he saw the individual spoken of withdraw from the palace, accompanied by his train of followers.

The dismissal of the favorite was ordered by Nero, for the purpose of diminishing the interest and power of his mother at court. Through the favor of Claudius, the preceding emperor, Pallas had been endowed with that degree of authority which made him assume the character and importance of first minister. He connived at the worst designs of Agrippina, and was the first to propose to the emperor Claudius, the incestuous marriage with her—his niece—and the adoption of her son, Nero, into the empire.

His words were reported to Agrippina, and foreseeing in his dismissal the downfall of her power, she did not hesitate

to express her indignation mingled with threats, and upbraid him with ingratitude for the services she had conferred, and even the crimes to which she had been instrumental to insure his succession.

"You have dismissed him, then?" said Agrippina to her son when they were alone.

"Aye," replied Nero, carelessly. "Cæsar shall never be governed by the arts of a freedman."

"Yet, is it through him," rejoined his mother, "that you wear the crown."

"'Tis but just," replied Nero, laughing, "that he should be the first to feel the power he has given me."

"Have a care," replied his mother, with difficulty curbing the temper for which she was proverbial, "That power may not last longer than *she* desires, who gave, and can deprive you of it."

"By the same means as you acquired it," replied Nero, tauntingly, as he alluded to the death of Claudius by poison.

"Monster," exclaimed Agrippina, "is this the gratitude for that love which forbore not even from crime? But my love is now at an end, and in its place look for the vengeance of a mother. Think not I sport with thee," she continued, her anger heightening as she observed the smile which succeeded her threats, "nor deem that though I be but woman, I stand alone and unaided. The sceptre I gave thee shall be but a lifeless branch, and the Cæsars' diadem but iron to wound and bind thee. If I have been guilty for thy sake, my deeds shall not witness against me from thy lips."

"Thy threats are vain," replied her son, in a tone of sarcastic levity, "even as thy vengeance is impossible. It matters not through what means I wear the crown; *'tis mine*. The army is on my side, and any treason against the emperor would be followed by death."

"Death!" retorted Agrippina.

"I have said it," rejoined Nero, calmly; "but what terrors would death have to one familiar with his ministry?"

"Taunt me no more," cried Agrippina, her rage becoming ungovernable, "or thou shalt feel I am powerful to do as say. The fidelity of the army in which thou trustest, shall be corrupted, and thou thyself left alone to protect a throne crumbling beneath thee. Think not though thou art in possession of that throne, that another heir cannot be produced, whose claims will be hailed with joy because they are recommended by justice."

"Thou ravest," said Nero, endeavoring by assumed indifference, to conceal his fears. "Who is he who dare dispossess my power?"

"*Britannicus!*" replied Agrippina, her eyes beaming with malignant delight as she watched the effect of his rival's name.

"Ha!" said Nero, involuntarily starting, and endeavoring to conceal the emotion his mother's threat excited. "Yet would they laugh at thee, and spurn the claimant. He is but a boy."

"A prince is surrounded by his counsellors," replied Agrippina, "whose wisdom atones for his youth. Have I placed *thee* on the throne, but to make thy power an instrument of ingratitude? What! have I cut off the Silani, one of whom, but for me, would have held thy place? Descended from the house of Cæsar the public voice was loud in his favor. But I had a son for whose advancement even crime itself was held as light. May the gods," she continued, "wither this right hand, if ever the mother aid her son again"

"Woman!" exclaimed Nero, Agrippina's temper kindling in her son, "a truce to thy services and crimes. The crown I wear is from ~~the~~ gods, not thee."

"That crown," said his mother, "shall yet rest on the head of Britannicus." At the mention of the name, a stern frown contracted the brow of Nero, and as she urged his claims she unconsciously sealed his doom. "That boy," she continued,

"is the lawful issue of Claudius. For thee, ungrateful, have I wrested from him right, and given it to one who owns it only by the favor of adoption, and now dares to insult that mother who won and gave all to him. But by the manes of those whose blood is on my head for thee, all shall be disclosed, even though I die for my crimes. The marriage with my own uncle, the poison which removed him only to give his crown to thee—the guilt and calamities I have caused in the house of Cæsar—all shall be avowed to the people. From murder, which has hung like a pestilence over that ill-starred house, the gods have yet preserved Britannicus. The recovery of his own shall expel the usurper. The daughter of Germanicus shall appear in the camp, and present to the soldiers their rightful prince. The descendants of those who have fought under the conduct of the sire, will not refuse to hear the daughter. Pardon, pardon, thou shade of my murdered husband," she continued, in a tone broken by rage and remorse, and bursting into tears, "pardon a *mother's* guilt." She flung herself on a couch, giving way to the violent grief of passion and disappointment, not repentance.

She was aroused by the gentle voice and touch of a child, who used playfulness and endearment to moderate her grief. She looked up and beheld Britannicus, and as she clasped him to her heart, not with the impulse of love, but the feelings of one who felt that round him were centred all her designs of interest and ambition; she alternately smiled and wept as she revolved her chances of success. Alas! his innocence had not suspicion of the wiles and changes which surrounded him; that bright, laughing eye which sported with the images of its own creation, was soon to be closed by the rough hand of the assassin, and "the morn and liquid dew of youth" to be overcast by a tyrant and a rival.

CHAPTER II.

THE DICE.

THE threats of Agrippina sank deep into the mind of her son. Acquainted with the stern resolution of a character, which—in his own case—did not hesitate at crime for the completion of its end, he knew that all the arts of revenge and ambition would be called in requisition to ensure the succession of Britannicus. His terrors easily anticipated the success of an appeal to the camp, if the daughter of Germanicus should appear there, her entreaties confirmed by the repentance of her own crimes, the charge of usurpation, and leading with her hand the living witness of her frauds, Britannicus, cheated of the throne of the Cæsars. The danger of a revolution in answer to such an appeal, aggravated fears for his throne, and his own safety.

About this time the Saturnalia—a public festival which lasted fifteen days—were being celebrated at Rome. It was a period of jubilee, in which all the inequalities of distinction were merged in a general republicanism of feeling, manner and expression. The master relinquished for a time the superiority of his condition, and the slave forgot the servile condition of his existence. "Use," says Horace to his slave, "the freedom of December, according to ancestral custom."

The festivities of the period extended also to the imperial court, and Britannicus and his sister, Octavia—the future empress—being inmates, the emperor participated in their juvenile sports. Among the rest was a fashionable game entitled, "Who shall be king?" in which the different competitors decided their chance by throwing the "Tali," or dice.

The game had hitherto run in favor of Nero, and the last competitor for the honor of ruling the feast was Britannicus. To the suspicious mind of Nero, the game was typical of their

competition for empire, should Agrippina fulfil her threats. His worst fears were realized, when, looking up, he beheld his mother waiting attentively the expected throw of her favorite.

"Ha! ha!" exclaimed Nero, with exultation, as he construed the failure of Britannicus into his future defeat; "thou hast thrown but 'Canes.'* By Jupiter," he continued, taunting obliquely the ambitious hopes of Agrippina, "methinks that thou shalt rather be one of those who wait on us with wine and perfume, than fill the chair of *King*."

The emphasis was not lost on Agrippina. "My Lord," she said, "the chances of the Tali are equal. On *your* throw hangs your *kingdom*."

The emperor seized the dice-box, and with assumed carelessness threw. "Venus!"† shouted Nero. "By the gods, *kingdom* is mine still."

The emperor, with a satisfaction the greater, as present fortune was a prognostic of future success, took his seat in right of the office awarded him by chance. His commands were imposed on the guests with justice and impartiality, and obeyed with cheerfulness. But the authority with which he was invested, he resolved to make an instrument of ridicule against Britannicus.

"And now, cousin," he said with an air of playfulness, "a monarch, to be just, must be impartial. In right of our election, we command thee to stand in the centre of the room and entertain us with a song."

By this command, he hoped that a boy not yet habituated to society or the pleasures of the table, would acquit himself in so awkward and embarrassed a manner, as to render himself an object of derision. Britannicus rose from his seat with a confidence which disappointed, while it surprized Nero. He went to the appointed place, and with a promptitude which showed, that though a boy in years he felt and had pondered on his con-

* The lowest throw.

† The highest throw.

dition, sang with a pleasing and melancholy voice, some verses from the poet Ennius applicable to his own situation, adverting to the injustice of an usurper, and the misfortunes of a prince, driven from the throne of his ancestors. The condition of a Cæsar obeying where he should command; the youth of a prince who bore in patience what he had not the power to resist; the truth which breathed in every tone; and the melancholy which seemed to flow from the consciousness of wrongs he could not redress, all flung an eloquent charm around the injured Britannicus, which made the jest, like the arrow of an unskilful archer, recoil upon its maker. Heated with wine, and in the hour of revelry throwing off all reserve and dissimulation, they clamored loudly against the wrongs of Britannicus. "The prince," they cried, "has been defrauded of the throne. Down with usurpers! Claudius is dead. The crown descends to his son, Britannicus."

Sympathy reigned in every breast, and their expressions of loyalty to the son of Claudius created tumult throughout the apartment. The experiment had been unsuccessful, and Nero enraged and disappointed, rising from his throne, hastened to his chamber.

CHAPTER III.

THE SORCERESS.

MIDNIGHT found the tyrant revolving the dangers of his throne, and meditating the death of his rival. His apprehensions were excited by the sentiment of compassion which prevailed through the assembly. The expression of that sentiment had been controlled neither by the courtesy of the guests, nor fear of their monarch. If, in his presence, they thus boldly declared their intentions, what might he not expect from private cabal and intrigue, where they were freer to speak and act?

The prince had, in the selection of those verses, exhibited an acuteness which might ripen into a daring to assert his rights, and a talent to maintain them. The very injustice which formed the theme of his song, had branded Nero with the epithet of "usurper," and the excitement produced by the appeal, might originate a rebellion against his throne, if the boldness of Britannicus were not curbed in its infancy. The offence which rankled so deeply in his own breast, was not a crime to justify the public measures of trial and execution; but one, which appealing to his own fears, palliated the act of private revenge.

"That young serpent," he said as he paced his chamber, "must be swept from my path. His words are poison to me, and influence the people against their prince. While he breathes, Nero is not safe. Besides, the rabble would have a double motive against my throne, and while they reinstated this boy, would avenge the murder of his sire. This torrent must be checked ere it reach my throne. He hath spirit quick to conceive, and it may be, when years are on him, as prompt to execute. He hath, withal, a gentle melancholy in his manner, which while it speaks of wrong, insensibly appeals for redress. He is favored, too—caressed by my bold, ambitious mother. A spirit like hers, fiery and impatient at my ingratitude, would not hesitate to remove me from the throne by the same means as she placed me there. Ha! 'tis not the throne, Cæsar, but thyself art in danger. Both must be quickly cared for; and this young flower crushed ere it ripen. Without there! Who waits?"

A page entered and made obeisance. "Hie thee," said Nero, "to the guard. Order hither Julius Pollio, the tribune." The page bowed and withdrew.

"Claudius is in his grave," continued the tyrant musing—"the nuptial tie that bound my mother to him restrained not her hand from guilt. True, she was ambitious to see her son upon the throne, and now the same motive may hurl me from it. He fell at the banquet; his dish was poisoned. She hath

a bold and fearless heart, and a hand that quivers not though it be stretched to murder. Cæsar, thou must break this web the fates are weaving round thy throne. Who's there?" The tribune entered.

"Thou art a soldier. Wearest thou that sword in honesty to Cæsar?" said Nero abruptly.

The tribune laid his hand upon the hilt.

"'Tis true to Cæsar's person and his throne."

"Enough," said Nero, approaching and addressing him with more familiarity. "Dost wish to see me reign and prosper. Would'st sweep all enemies from mine eyes?"

"Cæsar," replied Pollio, "may command his servant for a soldier's duty."

"Nay, it is not there I need thee," rejoined Nero, lowering his voice and looking slowly round the chamber, "not there—not there. Hast thou not e'en now in chains, one Locusta, a sorceress, under sentence for her crimes by poison?"

"She is in prison under my custody," answered the tribune.

"Soldier," replied Nero, pressing into his hand a purse of coin, "with this I buy thy secrecy and service. Thou art loyal to thy prince. He is in danger from an enemy."

"An enemy!" rejoined the tribune, half unsheathing his sword.

"Aye," replied Nero, his hope increasing as he saw in the attachment of the soldier a ready instrument for his designs; "and a kinsman of his own. 'Tis the boy Britannicus. I tell thee this very night the stripling made my banquet-hall a scene of riot. He scrupled not to speak before us, of himself exiled from the throne of the Cæsars. Ha! do'st see my business now? Allowed to live, his words will kindle seditions, and thy prince's life be endangered. What sayest thou? Locusta can aid thee, and liberty and pardon shall reward her deed."

"Cæsar may command Pollio," replied the tribune, "and to her he will do thy bidding."

"Nay, we will go ourself with thee," said Nero, hastily ad-

justing his mantle, his conscience ever suspicious of falsehood and treachery. "'Tis now midnight. The palace is at rest, and with the word the sentinels are easily passed. Lead on."

As the wretched being whose dungeon they were approaching, heard the tread of an armed soldier, she started from her pallet, and uttered a hasty prayer to the gods, as she anticipated immediate death. The flickering torch borne by the tribune, shed a fearful and uncertain light on the darkness of her cell; and as the terrors of her guilt converted the moving shadows into living objects, a piercing scream rang through the prison, and she fell to the earth.

"Raise her," said Nero to the tribune. She trembled as Pollio touched her.

"Who are ye," she said in a deep and hollow voice, her face still turned to the ground.

"Woman," said Pollio, "we come to save thee."

"I know ye well," she replied, "ye are come to bind and torture me. But what can *man* do? It is the furies I dread. Night and day they lash, and their fires burn within me."

"It is the emperor," said Pollio in a subdued tone, and stooping to her, "he comes to pardon thee."

"Cæsar!" said the woman rising slowly, and in the effort the chains, giving a dismal echo, "Cæsar here, and to pardon *me*?"

There is a terror in the aspect of guilt, which for a moment daunts the purpose, and subdues the courage of the accomplice. The furrowed cheek, the brow that wears its habitual frown, and the eye that beams with malignant sternness, makes us shudder as we recognise in the deformity of guilt the abasement of our own nature. Hardened as he was, as he looked on her he almost relinquished the deadly purpose for which he was to employ her. She stood erect to the full height of an athletic masculine frame. Her black hair fell thick and matted on her bare shoulders, her fettered arms were folded on her chest, while her dark full eye, whose unsteadiness seemed to fear the gaze

of a human being, wandered with that wild and furtive glance which shuddered to meet objects of reproof or accusation.

"We come to give thee liberty," said Nero, hesitating with a momentary fear as he met that eye which glowed with the unnatural light his distorted visions kindle in the maniac. "But—"

"Another crime?" said Locusta, with a readiness which anticipated the price of her pardon.

"We need thine aid and quickly, too," replied Nero. "Our throne is in peril from a stripling; thou and thine arts can alone remove him. We have chosen thee for thou art skilful, and the poison can be administered with more secrecy than we can use the dagger. Prepare the drug—let it be sure, and thou art free from chains and death!"

"Is this, then, the condition of my pardon?" asked the wretched woman, as with impatience she dashed aside a tear that rose like the departed spirit of humanity, to look for the last time on the ruin which crime had made of nature. "And must this hand once more mix the deadly draught for the paltry boon of life?"

"Even so," said the tyrant, as he trembled at the hesitation which might defeat his designs. "Choose now, between the tortures which await thee, or the liberty thou canst so easily purchase."

"Tortures!" exclaimed the wretch, muttering his last words, "'tis here—here!" she continued, raising her fettered hands to her head, "here they burn like the fires of Pluto. The gods—the gods protect me!"

"Ha! dost thou refuse?" cried Nero, in a tone not more of disappointment than rage at disobedience. "Well may'st thou supplicate the gods, for thine end is near. Pollio," he continued turning to the tribune, "to-morrow morning the sorceress dies."

The words rang in her ear with all the terrors of instant death, and the cruelties which the tyrant might devise to em-

bitter it. Though inured to scenes of horror, practice had not taken its sting from death, and the untrodden path of the future, to her, was haunted by the shades of those whose death-struggles she had watched.

"Pardon, pardon?" she cried falling at Nero's feet, "I will do thy bidding, let me but *live*."

"'Tis well," said the tyrant; "follow us."

CHAPTER IV.

THE DRUG.

"'Tis midnight," said Nero, as he trod his chamber with uneasy gait; "fit time for the deadly work it witnesses. My throne hath been gained by poison—by the same means must it be cemented. A throne like mine must not be relinquished for a boy. That fledgeling's wings must be clipped, or its flight will be bold and soaring. But, should they fail? How then? Psha! these are idle fears. Why should they fail when the drug is sure, and the victim bound to the altar? Ha! ha! 'tis a sacrifice for a kingdom, and one which will not need the aid of the Haruspices to seek whether it bodeath weal or woe." He paused and listened at the door of the adjoining chamber. "All is still. Perchance his sleep is that of death. Cæsar, thou art safe. This owl is silent. Thou need'st not fear his song of omen more. Ha! Some one stirs. A groan!" He fell back in terror as Locusta rushed from the chamber of Britannicus. They gazed on each other in that appalling silence which either seemed unwilling or afraid to break. As they stood wrapped in the horror of those thoughts they dared not utter, and trembling before the visible distortions crime had wrought in the countenance of each, they resembled spirits of evil risen from their unholy spells. Locusta shuddered as she pointed her bony finger to the apartment, and the tyrant's hand instinctive-

ly sought his sword as he met the unnatural expression of her eye.

"Speak," he said, after a pause, almost whispering; "what hath befallen?"

"The gods," answered Locusta, in a sepulchral tone, "have cursed the deed, and spared the boy."

"Ha! soceress, dost sport with me!" cried Nero. "By heaven and earth, if this be true, thou shalt drain thy own deadly cup. Why is this? Was it weak? Hast thy cursed hand faltered in its duty?"

"I know not," said the wretched woman; "the draught I gave hath never failed before, but youth hath energies which struggle against death. We stood by his bed. We watched. By the dim light we thought his lips worked, and his face grew ashy. We waited for the last fearful groan.—'Twas vain.—He moved, and fell again to sleep."

"Sleep! It may be of death," rejoined Nero, his fears eagerly exchanging semblance for reality.

"It is death's image," replied Locusta, "but wants his palor and silence."

"And sleeps he now," said Nero.

"Even so," rejoined the woman. "Thou wouldst not disturb him? Hath not the first attempt been an omen to thee that the gods will his life?"

"The gods!" retorted Nero; "now by the temple of Jupiter, 'tis *me* thou art to serve, and *my* will thou must obey. Slave, if the deed be not done, *thy* life be the forfeit."

The miserable woman trembled as before at the mention of mention of death. "Hath Cæsar no mercy?" said the sorceress in a tone of humiliation and agony which recoiled upon her own ear like the vain supplication of her victims.

"Not for such as thou," rejoined Nero; "if thou askest mercy thou shalt have that of the serpents' fangs. Even such as thou thyself hast had on others. Ha! Pollio! How now?"

"The deed hath not prospered," said the tribune.

"If it prosper not," rejoined Nero, "thine shall be the sorceress' fate. Vile cowards! palter ye thus with your prince? Ye have concerted for your own safety, and reck not the dangers, which, serpent-like, gird our throne. Trifle no longer, or ye shall find your sport recoil upon yourselves. Away! even while he sleeps prepare a draught as sure as the assassin's knife. The boy must die. Away!"

CHAPTER V.

DEATH.

THE drug was at length prepared, for the failure of which their own lives were to answer. Every moment that the prince lived, the tyrant imagined gave strength to sympathy, and number to his adherents. To obviate pressing danger, and remove his own fears, the draught must be speedily administered. The period appointed was the hour of dinner, when, according to the rules of court, the junior branches of the imperial family were served at a side-table in presence of their own relations, and the young nobility. The revolting task devolved upon an officer who attended the prince at table. By his side sate [his sister, Octavia. At an adjoining table the emperor reclined upon his couch, and on his right hand was Agrippina

Mother and son sate in silence, but in the expression of the latter as he occasionally looked towards Britannicus, suspicion could have easily detected his designs, and anxiety for their success. It was the duty of the officer alluded to in attending upon the prince to taste his food and drink. To obviate the discovery which would be the necessary result of the deaths of both, an innocent beverage was prepared, and so hot that the prince's rejection of it was anticipated, and provided for.

"It is too hot," said the prince, returning it; the officer diluted it with some cold water in which the potion was mixed.

Nero watched the operation eagerly. His lips moved with imprecations of revenge against the tools of his crime, should this potion also fail.

"Prince," he said, raising his goblet, "we drink to thee." The wine was scarcely tasted, when in fearful answer to the pledge, Britannicus fell from his seat; the powers of life seemed suspended, his limbs were palsied, and a deadly film obscured his eyes. The guests rushed from their seats, and surrounded him; his sister, Octavia, knelt by him, supporting his head on her arm, while Agrippina stood rooted to the spot, her eyes fixed in horror upon Nero, as suspicion flashed on her mind. The tyrant stirred not from his couch, but with a forced smile endeavored to assuage the excitement which prevailed through the chamber, said; "It is but an epileptic fit, to which the prince has been subject from infancy. It will soon pass away, and he will recover his senses."

"There is treachery here," cried Agrippina, regarding him sternly. "I call the gods to witness I am innocent. Thou and thy satellites shall answer this."

"Ha!" cried the tyrant, starting from his couch, and flashing on her a glance which made her tremble for her own fate. "Tallest to thy son of treachery? Woman tremblest not to think on that? I.o! the manes of Claudius are yet unavenged."

The guilty mother grew pale with rage and terror as she saw her own crime, perpetrated for her son, an instrument of retribution in his hand. Tears of bitterness fell rapidly as she felt the allusion to the death of Claudius was a type of the doom of Britannicus. In the demise of that prince, she had lost the last weapon of her policy and ambition. The last obstacle to the tyrant's sway had been removed, his throne stood unmolested, and the reed on which she leant was broken.

"He is gone," echoed through the chamber. A faint groan was heard, accompanied with a violent spasm, and the prince fell lifeless from his sister's arm. She flung herself upon the

body, weeping, and carressing it. In the innocence of childhood she poured out expressions of love and sorrow. Even while she looked on him, she hoped the fit would pass, and her brother revive. But as she observed the color fading from his cheek, and his eyes become dim and glassy, hope sank within her. She touched him, and feeling the vital warmth had fled, said tremulously. "He is cold!" The bystanders uttered a groan of horror. The tyrant started, as guilt construed it into a cry for vengeance.

"One and the same night," says Tacitus, "saw the murder of Britannicus and his funeral. Both were preconcerted."

AGRIPPINA.

A PASSAGE FROM THE REIGN OF NERO.

My last is come—my last, I know, is come—
'Tis wondrous horrid—now
My lawless love, and boundless power reproach me.
Lee.

CHAPTER I.

SABINA POPPEA.

IN Nero's daily intercourse with the beautiful Sabina, she spared neither art nor entreaty to ensure his favor, and advance her own interest. His repeated visits to her, the gaiety of his manner and his ardent expressions of admiration and love, in proportion as they exhibited indifference to the empress Octavia, kindled within *her* breast an ambition to share the throne.

"You love me, then?" said the artful favorite.

"As man never loved?" replied Nero, passionately.

"Yet you would hesitate to avow that love to the people," she replied; "your mother, too, favors the empress,—my lord," she continued, in a tone of raillery, endeavoring to undermine the power of Agrippina, "you are young in government as in years; you hold the sceptre, when will you use it? You wear the diadem—why will you share its brightness with another?"

Will you be the first of the illustrious house of Cæsar, who succeeded to power only to transfer it to another? You profess to hold the reins, will you permit another to guide the steeds?" Her words bore additional weight with Nero, as they appealed to his pride, at the same time arousing his fears for the stability of his power, and the dignity of personal independence.

Sabina observed the change which her words had wrought in his expression, and continued to follow up her triumph with reproof and protestations of her love.

"Were power yours alone, my lord, our nuptial tie would have by this time been joined, and none dared to dispute the will of Cæsar, or question the propriety of his choice. It cannot be," she continued, artfully adverting to her own unrivalled charms of person, "that the beauty, which first won thee, hath so soon lost her spell, or passion forgot the tones she once breathed to her idol."

"Neither, neither," exclaimed the emperor. "But—"

"What, my lord?" inquired Sabina, as she observed his hesitation. "Can it be you would disown alliance with one who boasts not the Cæsar's blood? Though not nobly born, the daughter of ancestors honored with triumphs would not degrade a Cæsar's throne."

As she spoke a flush of pride mantled her cheek, and her eye beamed with a lustre which seemed to reflect the departed glories of which she spoke.

"By Venus! thou art lovelier than ever," exclaimed Nero, forgetting the subject of their discourse in admiration of her beauty.

"Nay, nay, my lord, a truce to flattery," replied the beauty, anxious to recall him to the ambitious theme which engrossed her mind; "tell me," she said, aiding entreaty by caresses, "what is it which delays our nuptial-rites?"

"I cannot tell thee now, fairest," replied Néro, anxious to conceal the maternal control, whose partiality had been trans-

ferred from Britannicus to his sister Octavia, and whose warmest energies were devoted to her cause.

"You doubt my love," said Sabina, in a tone of grief, which to the voluptuary guaranteed its truth.

"I deem thee true, Sabina," he replied; "nay, taunt me not with suspicion—why should I doubt one, who for me hath forsaken all? Yet—"

"Speak, speak, my lord," said Sabina impatiently, "and let me know the worst—nay, pronounce my death; if that be my reward, love will give me patience in suffering. Thou knowest not yet the love of woman, which, like the star, shines brightest for the darkness which besets it—oh! were I thy wife," she continued, adding power to her words by the humility of kneeling, "I would not implore thee, and in vain—prayer would bear the resemblance of thy will, for then would it come from her thou would'st love."

The artful allusion to the empress revived in Nero's mind the means which supported her on the throne, and prevented the elevation of Sabina. "Blame me not," he said, raising and pressing her fondly to his heart, "if for a time I bend to the will of Agrippina. She hath gained me the throne; it is but fitting that for a time her advice should guide the exercise of its power but when free; fair one—"

"Aye, *when—when* wilt thou rule as a Cæsar should," interrupted Sabina: "absolute and alone? If the hand, which sways thee now, rule thee longer, its power will become one with the empire. Break the chain, my lord, ere yet the links which bind the son, extend their bondage to his people. Were I Cæsar, the hand which crushed my sovereignty, should also take my life."

"Ha! dost taunt me?" exclaimed Nero, as he paused for a moment on her words, his pride not more alarmed at the control of personal freedom than that of sovereign power. "What wouldst thou?"

"*Not her death !*" rejoined Sabina, with an emphasis which contradicted the manifest import of her words.

"By the gods ! thou art right, my girl," said Nero ; his words subsiding into the tone of reverie, as he mused upon the excess of Agrippina's power ; "it must be curtailed—the net must be broken, or ere long its meshes will snare her son."

"Broken !—but how ?" replied Sabina, who lost not a word of his soliloquy, and desired to ripen the principle of resistance into enmity and hatred.

"How ?—ask me not how ?" said Nero, turning to her and resuming the wonted softness of his manner, "all shall be done to please thee—as thou art my love, so shalt thou be my queen."

"My lord," she replied, "ere *I* rise, *others* must fall ; more than one step intervenes between Sabina and Cæsar's throne. Yet why," she continued, dissembling, "should I dare to oppose the will of her who *rules* thee ? If it be indeed the pleasure of Agrippina that none save Octavia should share thy throne and power, I will bow to it for the sake of the honor she studies to preserve for thee untarnished. I can return to the husband I have left for *thee* ; and in retirement hear of the disgrace my love would not let me witness."

The emperor stamped with impatience as he heard her reproaches for submission to his mother, embittered by the assurance of her love. To secure her triumph she excited his fears as to the result of their connexion, and threatened separation at the moment she was resolved to wear the crown.

"Nay, Sabina, thou wilt not leave me ?"

"My lord," replied the ambitious woman, "I leave thee not alone,—those who share thy throne, share also thy love."

"None—none but thou," replied Nero, passionately ; "thou art even now my queen in all, save name, and that thou shalt have ere long. The control thou speakest of," he continued, while a dark frown contracted his brow, "shall be thrown off, and Cæsar *alone* shall sway the sceptre his people have given him."

Sabina had attained her desire. By appealing to his pride, she roused resistance; and by reproaching him for participating his power, had disguisedly transferred it to herself, and ensured the removal of those who opposed her ambition.

"From this time," continues Tacitus, "Nero shunned the presence of his mother. Whenever she went to her gardens, or to either of her seats at Tusculum or Antium, he commended her taste for the pleasures of retirement; at length, detesting her wherever she was, he determined to despatch her at once."

CHAPTER II.

THE DESIGN.

NERO's repeated visits to Sabina, her sincere declarations of passion, and artful allusions to the obstacles which the power of Agrippina presented, at length confirmed the doom of the latter. Resolved upon her death, he was yet uncertain as to means; poison and the poignard were expedients too frequently adopted to pass with impunity, or without suspicion; the murder of Britannicus had been too recent, to be erased from the public mind: and should he seek to effect his present object by similar means, popular indignation might not be confined merely to expressions. Considering also the character of his mother, a woman inured to crime, the administration of poison would be unsuccessful, as they who tampered with such arts were generally provided with antidotes. Assassination would be impracticable, as concealment would be impossible. He was equally perplexed regarding the manner of her death, as the means of its execution.

But the court of a despot is seldom deficient in panders to his pleasure, or instruments of his guilt; some invited by hope of

reward, and others by the desire of gratifying enmity. In this emergency Anicetus presented himself, who had risen from the condition of an enfranchised slave to the dignity of naval command. He had been Nero's tutor in his infancy, and the variance which at that period had constantly existed between himself and Agrippina, maturing now into hatred, made the work of death an act of pleasure.

"Thou hast not then forgotten the quarrels of my infancy?" said Nero, with assumed pleasantry, anxious to press into his service the private feelings of his minion.

"She ever thwarted me," replied Anicetus, "nor that alone, but threats of vengeance often followed disobedience to her commands."

"Ha! was't thou her *slave*, then?" inquired Nero, quickly.

"Not her *slave*," replied Anicetus with an air of offended pride, "but thy *tutor*."

Nero, by that epithet had dexterously touched the chord which vibrated to his purpose. "From what I told thee yesterday," he said, "*thou* can'st have thy revenge, and I my freedom. Her power is imperial in all but name; she has given *me* the crown, only to wear the sceptre *herself*. By this act will both our ends be answered."

"Poison is easiest," said the man with an air of coldness, which spoke as well his indifference to crime, as his resolve to perpetrate it.

"Not that—I dare not," rejoined Nero, nervously; "Britannicus is remembered yet, suspicion is rife, and her rumors busy. Hast thou not plied invention since we last met?"

"I have bethought me of a plan," said Anicetus, "but it will require more than the aid of one to effect it."

"What is it?" said Nero, regarding him attentively.

"Thy mother," replied Anicetus, "is fond of sailing-parties—we must bend her pleasure to our purpose; on one of these occasions, our design must be accomplished; the ele-

ments are treacherous and uncertain, and even malignity itself can but ascribe the event to chance."

"But how?" inquired the tyrant eagerly, the pleasure of a novel design counterbalanced by fears for its success.

"A galley," rejoined Anicetus, "could be easily constructed in such a manner, as that a portion of it should be detached from the rest and sink.

"If this should succeed," said Nero, "thou shalt have thy reward."

"It cannot fail," replied Anicetus, coldly, "if its management be confided to me."

"Thou shalt command not only *there*," rejoined Nero, "but be advanced from the dignity thou holdest now at Misenum. About it, then, and quickly—the season and opportunity favor us; the court is about to move to Baiæ, to celebrate the Quinquatrua; our design can be easily concealed; she is now at Antium; we will invite her thence to the ceremonies, and attend her ourself to the Villa Bauli, where this vessel must be at anchor to carry her to Baiæ.

"All shall be prepared," said Anicetus.

"Fail me not," rejoined Nero, "and thy services shall command Cæsar."

CHAPTER III.

ITS SUCCESS.

THE invitation was accepted, and couched in language calculated to produce the impression of perfect reconciliation, and remove all suspicion of stratagem or motive. "The humors of a parent claimed indulgence—allowance should be made for expressions of passion; and the petty differences it produced could not be effaced too soon." The opinion of reconciliation found easy currency, and according to his expectations she

was easily imposed on by the circulation of a report which favored her wishes. Upon her arrival from Antium, Nero descended to the shore to meet her, and by his affectionate embrace and reception of her, confirmed the impression his invitation produced. He conducted her to Bauli, where by a constant succession of amusements during the remainder of the day, he contrived effectively to disguise his unnatural design. The bark was delayed till a late hour in the evening, that darkness might conceal the plan, and ensure its success. That no mark of respect should be wanted, he awarded her the station of honor above himself at table. The feelings of the tyrant had become callous in his career of bloodshed and crime, and his manners, even amid the preparations for death, could assume the most perfect composure. On the present occasion they were marked by politeness and respect, while the gaiety and elegance of his conversation so far wrought on the unsuspecting mother, as to induce her to hope that their enmities were forgotten, and that she had recovered the alienated affections of her son.

The entertainment was protracted to a late hour, and Agrippina specified a wish to retire. Nero, dissembling to the last, expressed his willingness to accompany her to the shore. His manner, at parting, was even more endearing than before: he clasped her to his heart, and looked upon her with tenderness and affection. "It might be," says Tacitus, "that the sight of a mother doomed to destruction, might make even a heart like his yield to the touch of nature."

The night was unusually bright and starry; and the waters calmly reflected the brightness they borrowed from the skies; nature herself seemed to shudder at the design, and withdrew her wonted darkness which might have lent it concealment. As Nero lingered upon the shore for a few minutes, and eagerly watched the progress of the galley, he felt that in the brightness of the night the Fates opposed his will. "'Tis an unlucky light," he murmured, as he returned to the villa,

"and I fear bodes not success; even should it sink, she can escape."

Agrippina had embarked with only two of her train, Crepereius, and Acerronia, a female attendant. The galley progressed quietly; not a breath ruffled the waters, and the stillness which prevailed seemed a melancholy prelude to the tumult and confusion which followed. Crepereius was seated at the helm, while Acerronia lay at the foot of her mistress' couch, expressing her delight at the reconciliation which had taken place; that Nero had at length exhibited that affection and respect, to which his conduct had been so long a stranger.

The galley had advanced but a small distance, when, on a preconcerted signal, the deck over Agrippina's cabin fell in. Being heavily laden with lead, Crepereius was crushed under the weight; while the props of the bedroom being strong and solid, supported the incumbent weight, protecting Agrippina and her servant from a similar death. The design failed in the anticipated rapidity of its execution, on which alone it must have depended for success. Dismay and confusion followed. Those who were not privy to the design increased the consternation of the moment, by providing measures for their own safety, while their haste and terror embarrassed the guilty, and disconcerted their endeavors for success. The latter on the instant resolved to heave the galley on one side, and sink her at once; but the action not being simultaneous, and some rushing to the opposite side, the desired effect was frustrated, and the galley sank slowly.

"I am Agrippina!" exclaimed Acerronia, as the assassins, armed with oars and poles, approached her. She fell a victim to her fidelity, and died under repeated blows.

Agrippina in the meanwhile, availing herself of the disguise which the mistake occasioned, remained silent. She passed unrecognized among the assassins, and received no other injury than a slight wound on the shoulder.

In the meanwhile the rumor rapidly spread that Agrippina

was in danger. The public tongue imputed it to accident. The piers and sea-shore were covered by people bearing torches; some wading as far as safety would permit; others extending their hands with cries of encouragement, and assurances of rescue; boats glided in numbers from the shore, the waving of the torches, and the sparkling of the waters, making it rather a scene of jubilee than of death; while the discordant shouts of the boatmen, mingled with the groans and lamentations of those on shore, contrasted fearfully with the gay and glittering scene the bay presented.

Following the example of the other passengers, Agrippina plunged into the water, and was at length rescued by a bark which had put off from the shore. She was instantly conveyed to her own villa.

CHAPTER IV.

THE SON.

IMPATIENCE and uncertainty marked the demeanor of Nero upon his return. "Would the design prove abortive?—was Anicetus faithful?—or could bribery seduce him from his purpose?" were questions which harassed him with that vain and trembling curiosity, which dared to question the future, yet shuddered at the reply it might render. To those whose happiness hangs on hope, time "halts like a foul and ugly witch." To his mind, racked with expectation and fear, curiosity, pain, hope, and the thousand actions, motives, and sensations of an hour, were compressed into each lingering moment. He hourly expected Anicetus, yet feared the tidings he might bear. "The vessel might have sunk, and she escaped. What then? Her quickness might discover the falsehood of the invitation, the hypocrisy of his manner, and the design they were meant to hide. She might betake herself to the camp—rebellion might

follow her appeal; the prætorians were loyal to the Cæsar's house, but not less so to the memory of Germanicus." Thus conscience held the lash of fear over her deformed victim, and the triumphs of success faded before the terrors of revenge. He betook himself to his couch, but his brief intervals of rest were disquieted with the stifled cries of his mother, as she sank in the water. She stood beside his couch, her hair wild and disordered, her garments dripping and torn, and her eyes beaming with the sternness of reproof and vengeance. He could not rest, he rose and paced his chamber; his starting and uneasy gait evidencing the agitation of his mind.

"How now—thy news, and quickly?" cried the tyrant, faint and pale with terror, and almost tottering towards him, as Anicetus entered.

"Thy mother still survives," returned the man, with a hardihood and boldness consistent with his character and crimes; "amid the confusion, her person was mistaken, and she has escaped but slightly wounded."

"Does she suspect?" asked Nero, while his hand trembled as he rested on his minion.

"So it is reported," rejoined Anicetus with imperturbable coldness, which contrasted strongly with the nervous weakness of the other.

Nero seemed rooted to the spot, as imagination, heightened by the colors of guilt, painted the rage and vengeance of his mother. She stood before him again even more plainly than previously; his whole frame shook with terror as he met her eye; he started, as the chamber echoed with her threats and indignation; already he saw one general insurrection of army and people; the swords of the factious glittered before his eyes, and their shouts of vengeance for the wrongs of Agrippina rang in his ears. "All—all is known then!" exclaimed Nero, clasping his hands in despair.

Anicetus remained silent.

"Undone! undone!" he continued, his fears betraying them-

selves in the tremor of his voice. "Cæsar, the Fates conspire against thee; hopeless! friendless! The next blow must be thy throne."

"Not friendless," rejoined Anicetus; whose industry was not to be checked, and whose boldness could not be daunted by a single failure. "Leave the last act to me, and Cæsar need fear neither for his throne nor for himself."

The sternness and resolution evinced in the demeanor of the man, not more than in his words, revived the hopes of Nero, and inspired him with an artificial courage as to the conduct of his mother. "Fail me not in this," he cried, with the desperation of a gamester who feels his only chance of success staked upon the one remaining throw: "let the blow be but sure. Save the imperial dignity from the grasp of rebellion, and it shall be said, 'his enfranchised slave saved the throne of Cæsar.'"

A domestic entering announced the arrival of Ageronius, the freedman of Agrippina. "Bid him enter," said Nero, vainly endeavoring to subdue the fears which suggested themselves at the mention of his mother, and the nature of her message.

"When I drop my dagger," said Anicetus, hastily approaching and whispering Nero, "and seize Ageronius, call on your guard, and order him to be loaded with irons—leave the rest to me."

A significant glance passed between them, and their further converse was interrupted by the entrance of Ageronius.

The freedman knelt to the emperor; he was the bearer of a message lenient as it was polite. The scene of violence which followed the accident, and the death of Acerronia, were circumstances conclusive as to the guilt of her son. The blow given to Acerronia was evidently meant for herself. Notwithstanding the brutality of her son, and the certainty of his guilty designs, in consideration of his power, and the readiness with which he procured the tools of his crimes, she was induced to temporize and conceal her feelings.

The purport of the message delivered by Ageronius was as follows, from Tacitus:—"That by the favor of the gods, and the good auspices of the emperor, she had escaped from shipwreck. The news, she doubted not, would affect her son; but for the present she wished he would forbear to visit her. In her situation, rest was all she required."

The message was scarcely concluded, when Anicetus dropped his dagger between the legs of Ageronius as he knelt, and seizing him with violence, at the same time holding up the poignard, exclaimed—"Treachery to Cæsar and his throne!"

"Ha! traitor!" cried the emperor; "my guard—bind him with chains," he said, as the soldiers, seizing, hurried the wretched man from the apartment.

"This dagger, said Anicetus, "can aid the report that he came from thy mother, enjoined with treason to thy life. Then," continued the wretch with a grim smile, as he detailed the successful result of his hellish invention: "then follows her death, which can be easily imputed to her own hand, in despair that her design has failed."

"Right," said Nero, faintly smiling; his lips pale and quivering, as conscience detached the chain of guilt, and showed the fatal dependency of link on link. "Right—but the blow must be dealt ere she can expect her freedman—his sojourn here will create suspicion. Away—fly!" he continued, his hands locked earnestly; "take with thee men fit for the task. Let the blow be certain, and my fears ended."

"Fear not thy servant," said Anicetus, as he left the apartment.

CHAPTER V.

THE MOTHER.

"HARK! what noise is that?" cried Agrippina, starting from her couch, and flying to the arms of the only female attendant who watched her fitful sleep. A dead silence followed the question, the more dismal for the doubts and fears which perplexed the wretched mother, and the confusion which had but recently prevailed on the shore. The more she pondered on the scene of horror and violence from which she had escaped, the more convinced was she of the fatal intentions of her son. Each moment told her of the precariousness of a life, which chance had saved, but design had doomed. In black array rose before her the calamities she had entailed upon the house of Cæsar, and the crimes of which she had been guilty for the promotion of her own interests, or that of her unnatural son. The manes of Claudius rose before her in the distant gloom of the chamber, denouncing the crime by which he fell, and taunting her for the reward she had met, the ingratitude of Nero. She started with anxiety at every sound that passed, expecting the arrival of Ageronius, and expressed sorrow and impatience, as she found herself deceived by the distant murmur of the water, or the sighing of the night wind.

In the meanwhile Anicetus disposed a guard around her villa, and seized the slaves, that there might be no communication with their mistress. All method of egress or escape being thus prevented, he proceeded to her apartment.

"'Tis he! 'tis he!" she exclaimed with delight, and rushing forward, she met the forbidding aspect of her murderer instead of her expected messenger. She trembled for a moment, as in the determined visage of Anicetus and his two followers, she read the certainty of her doom. Her female servant has-

tened to the door. "And do you too, leave me?" exclaimed the wretched woman, in that terror of solitude which haunts the last moments of the guilty.

She extended her hands in silent supplication; but the men stood unmoved, even by the tears which choked her speech. At length, with an evident effort, she said, "If you come from the prince, tell him I am well. If your intents be murderous, you are not sent by my son; the guilt of matricide is foreign to his heart."

On the instant she was surrounded. Oloaritus, a centurion of marines, unsheathed his sword. At the sight—roused, as it were, by a latent sense of pride, which would not permit her to fall under the influence of fear—she uttered those memorable words, in which she reproached herself for having given birth to such a monster. She presented her person full to the sword of the centurion, exclaiming—"Strike!" Hercules, his comrade, at that moment gave her the first blow on the head with his club. She expired at length under repeated wounds.

Her self-reproach might have been even stronger, could she have thought that her unnatural son would admire her when dead *for the elegance of her form*. Some years before she had had warning of her fate, when informed by some Chaldeans whom she consulted as to the future fortune of her son: "That he would reign at Rome, and kill his mother."

"Let him kill me," exclaimed the ambitious woman, "*but let him reign!*"

* The original expression is "*Ventrem feri.*"

THE DEATH OF NERO.

"Better be with the dead,
Whom we, to gain our place, have sent to peace;
Than on the torture of the mind to lie
In restless ecstasy!"—*Macbeth*.

CHAPTER I.

THE PEOPLE.

EVEN to the termination of his reign, Nero persisted in the same levity of character which had hitherto marked its course. He was still swayed by a passion for dramatic entertainments, and an ambition to be distinguished by his excellence in music. For the gratification of these desires, he had betaken himself to Naples, where the constant current of pleasure weaned his mind from the cares which embarrassed it at home. While here, his principal occupation was the construction of an hydraulic organ, which, if successful, he promised to exhibit on the stage. But the fancied security of a tyrant is as deceitful as the sullen calm which precedes the storm. It is, as it were, the momentary slumber of Nature ere she rises with renovated strength and collected energy. A fatal stillness hangs on the air, and the clouds muster in silence, like a host who rally in the ambush of midnight. So was it with Nero. While the

emperor forgot his dignity in the characters of coachman and comedian, his people renounced their allegiance, and the revolutionary feeling extended itself even to the provinces.

An insurrection had broken out in Gaul, under the conduct of one Julius Vindex, whose father, in the days of Claudius, had been senator, and at his instigation, Galba, the succeeding emperor, was creating a similar movement in Spain. Both, however, proved unsuccessful. Virginius Rufus was appointed to take the field against the Gauls, and defeating them to fly. So great was the disgust created among the Roman legions under his command by the character and frivolities of Nero, that they made a tender of the imperial dignity to Virginius, which was, however, declined. Vindex, unwilling to survive the defeat of his struggle for liberty, fell upon his sword on the field.

At length the intelligence of the danger which threatened his empire, and the emotion which prevailed throughout Italy, roused the enervate monarch from the lethargy into which vice and pleasure had plunged him. He abandoned his favorite hydraulic instrument, and the trifles which detained him at Naples, and hastened to Rome. His fears were, however, soon dissipated by the arrival of letters from Virginius, containing the death of the insurgent, Vindex. The emperor testified his pleasure by singing to his harp!

The defeat of his enemies, while it appeased his fears, gratified his pride. On his way to Rome, he had seen a monumental sculpture, representing a Roman soldier dragging along the ground a vanquished Gaul by the hair. He willingly imputed this event to a favorable omen from the gods; and their will had been already signified in the suppression of rebellion.

In the meantime, the spirit of faction which had so recently disturbed the peace of the provinces, was gradually extending to the very heart of his capital. The vices of his private life, and the unjust rapacity with which he seized the treasures of wealthy citizens, and squandered them in the hours of wanton-

ness and pleasure, were gradually dissolving the ties between prince and people. An event which had accelerated the progress of revolution, and, operating on the public mind, ripened into action those principles which but waited for a pretext.

The city was at that period threatened with a famine, and the people remained in eager anticipation of relief. At length a vessel arrived from Alexandria, supposed to be laden with corn. Their joy was soon exchanged for rage and indignation when they discovered, that instead of conveying the expected supply, the ship was laden with sand from the banks of the Nile, for the purpose of smoothing the arena for gladiators and wrestlers. They no longer restrained their sentiments. The transports of public rage were at times, exchanged for expressions of scorn and contempt towards their prince. The streets were filled with multitudes, clamorous with indignation and revenge.

"Away with this monster!" cried one of the leaders. "He sports with his people and their wants. We ask for bread; and he gives us sand. Down with the tyrant whose throne is supported by pillage and bloodshed!"

"Ay," replied another, "he hath plundered citizens to supply his wants and pleasures. When our country was in danger he hath been contending for prizes in Greece and Naples. He hath forgotten the name of Roman, and seeks to wrest it from us, also."

"Where is Vindex?" shouted a third. "He was a soldier. Better have a soldier on the throne, than a minstrel and player. Away with this buffoon! Away with him, we say. On! To the palace!"

The murmurs of popular discontent extended to an unexpected quarter. The prætorians, who, from the very nature of their office—body-guard to the Emperor—had been loyal to his throne, now exhibited symptoms of disaffection, and took side with the insurgents. Popular passions are seldom without a

leader whose eloquence and arts though apparently devoted to the public weal, are too frequently the tools of his own advancement.

Their tendency to rebellion was confirmed by the example of Nymphidius, a prætorian Præfect. To ingratiate himself with the populace, and ensure the destruction of the tyrant, he distributed bribes, and promised liberal bounty in the name of Galba. He thus endeavored to establish the dangerous precedent of a Prince's election to the throne by violence of the soldiery, rather than the sanction of a deliberative assembly. Thirty thousand sesterces were promised to each prætorian.

The soldiery being thus secured, his next aim was to represent to the senate the utterly destitute condition of the emperor, which therefore left that body comparatively in possession of supreme power. The assembly remained in suspense. Timidity and irresolution marked their proceedings.

The panic had reached the palace. The people and soldiery had at length thrown off the mask. Public opinion had yielded to the sense of oppression and rapacity. The sensualist paused in his pleasures, and the tyrant forgot his cruelty.

CHAPTER II.

THE PALACE.

Down with the tyrant! Away with the player!—Galba—a soldier for the Cæsar's throne!" Such were the cries uttered by the people as they surrounded the palace.

It is a fearful thing to witness the last moments of the guilty. The nerve which has supported them in the hour of bloodshed and horror, seems to be relaxed; the sternness which has never bent to circumstances, is at length awed into the weakness of childhood; and conscience, who has marked in silence the working of passion and the blow of the assassin, gives now to the tongue of the accuser the poison of revenge.

Such were the feelings of the tyrant as he heard without, the clamors of hatred and derision. The noise of his insulted people rang in his ears like the reproofs of conscience. It revived his career of crime and folly, and almost declared the penalty which was exacted for both.

"Hearest thou that Epaphroditus?" he exclaimed as another shout rent the air; how "wouldst thou advise? Flight? Speak, speak." Pale, hesitating and trembling, he fixed his eyes on the secretary.

"The hour for Cæsar's flight is not yet come," replied his favorite; "this many-mouthed monster can be silenced by force. Cæsar can yet appeal to the camp, and shall be answered by the loyalty of his soldiers."

"No, no, not one, not one left," ejaculated the wretched man; "they, too, have forsaken me. Ha! hearest thou that? They shout for Galba."

"They dare not raise *him* to the throne," replied Epaphroditus.

"Nay, talk not thus," replied Nero, "I tell thee they who have power *dare* to act as will. How now, Nymphidius?" he said abruptly, as the latter entered.

"All is lost," replied the præfect with dissembled regret.

"Lost!" retorted Nero, with an air of offended pride. "Now, by Jupiter! thou tauntest Cæsar on his throne. I tell thee Rome is safe while her Cæsar lives." The momentary courage which animated his words seemed to expire with them; his brow contracted, and his lips seemed to quiver as he muttered, "Death, death."

"Rome would be safe," replied Nymphidius, eyeing his terror with delight, "but the prætorians—"

"No more of that," interrupted Nero, as rage in turn supplanted fear, "no more of that. Treason in the camp, and sedition among the people."

"The Fathers, too—"

"Have joined them?" interrogated Nero.

"And are prepared to issue a fatal decree," replied Nymphidius.

"All, then, is lost," muttered the tyrant. "Oh, that the slaves were mine as before," he continued, in a tone of ferocity, "they should feel my vengeance."

"It is now too late to speak of vengeance," replied Nymphidius, with dissembled sympathy, "when rebellion is even at the palace-gate. Consult thy safety."

"Save me," said the helpless man clasping his hands imploringly, "and thou shalt own the gratitude of Cæsar."

"I can devise but one plan for thy escape," replied the Præfect, after a pause. "Thou hast but one place for retreat.—Egypt."

"Must I then fly?" said Nero, as he cast his eyes round the apartment, and felt that the abandonment of his palace was the abdication of his throne. "Can they not be appeased?"

"Thou hearest their clamor," said the Præfect; "as well might we tame the tempest."

"Then must Cæsar fly," exclaimed Nero. "Canst thou secure my retreat from the palace to the ship?"

"I will leave nought untried," replied Nymphidius, as he withdrew.

CHAPTER III.

CONSCIENCE.

"ALL is lost. Cæsar no longer fills the throne. The prætorians clamor for a soldier," fell incoherently from Nero, as he flung himself upon a couch. "Alone, alone. Where are now the praises which hailed me victor? Silent. Where are the flatterers that courted me in the moment of power? Gone.—Solitude—solitude," continued the wretched man, agitation and fear almost stifling his utterance.

"Ha! who's there?" he cried, seizing his sword, as terror whispered the approach of an enemy.

"Nymphidius," replied the stranger, entering.

"What tidings? Quick!" rejoined Nero, breathless with fear and impatience.

"Fortune is against the house of Cæsar," replied the Præfect, still wearing the mask in the affected sympathy of his manner. "Nought has been left untried by thy servant to quell this clamor, and nought save bribes drove the people from thy gate."

"Thanks, thanks, good fellow," said Nero, abruptly. "Say, hast thou secured my flight?"

"I did thy bidding," replied Nymphidius, "and ordered the soldiers to equip a vessel for thy conveyance to Egypt, but—"

"Well, did they so?"

"Not one," rejoined the Præfect. "The license of the populace hath extended to the camp, and the disaffected know no other motive save their own interests and wishes. I speak not," he continued, with that well-skilled hypocrisy which not only points the dart, but watches the rankling of the wound, "to give thee needless fears; but when I ordered them to repair to Ostia, the reluctance was too manifest to admit a doubt as to the allegiance of the prætorians. One of them asked me, '*Is it so wretched a thing to die?*' As he spoke, the sneering malignity which marked the expression of the man barbed the imputation of cowardice contained in his words.

"To die! To die!" muttered the tyrant, almost inaudibly. "Cæsar, hath it then come to this? Have the children arisen against their sire, taunting him with the fear of death? Alas!" exclaimed the wretched man, pressing his hands to his fevered brow, "now my deeds recoil on mine own head. The Fates ensnare me in the meshes of mine own net. Hark!" he continued, starting in terror as imagination painted the clamors of an insurgent people. "What noise was that?"

"My lord, I heard, none," replied the Præfect, calmly.

The tyrant listened attentively, when he found that he had become a dupe to his own fears. The tears of agony and shame came to his relief. He leant on the shoulder of the treacherous prætorian, and wept bitterly.

"Thou but sportest with time," said the Præfect in a tone which disguised design under affected sympathy. "Let not Rome see Cæsar play the girl, when her disobedience claims the sterner appeal of the sword and punishment."

"True, true," said the emperor, starting from his reverie, the mention of punishment reviving at once the sense of rank and power; "true, the tear should not be now the prince's weapon—the sword—the lash," he continued, convulsively locking his hands. "Slaves, slaves!"

"Those *slaves*," rejoined Nymphidius, with bitter irony, "may become masters when the sovereign abjures the sceptre."

As the Præfect spoke, the mention of concession to his people roused the dormant pride of the prince, and the recollections of the lofty house from which he traced his descent. He, for a moment, "forgot the taste of fear;" his eyes kindled, his countenance became flushed, and his form assumed an air of imperial command, as imagination seemed to embody the glories of his house.

"Cæsar," he exclaimed, after a pause, "shall die with that sceptre in his hand." The burst of pride, however was brief and weak. It sprang rather from a sense of insult than courage to resent it, and shone as faintly as the last torch ere it expires by the funeral-pile it watches. "*Thou* wilt not leave me, Nymphidius?" he said, imploringly, as fear began to reassert her former sway.

"My lord," replied the Præfect, "the time presses, the people clamor, and sedition is rife in the camp. Tarry here longer, and even *my* arm is weak to defend thee."

"Whither, whither, can I fly?" exclaimed the tyrant, clasping his hands in fear and doubt.

"From the palace," rejoined Nymphidius.

"They will detect and seize me," replied Nero. His voice faltered, and his face became ghastly as he added, "they will seek my blood; I have not spared theirs."

As he spoke a distant shout reached his ears. "Ha! hearest thou *that*?" he cried.

"It is the people," said the Præfect.

"Save me, save me," exclaimed Nero, rushing to the feet of the soldier, and burying his face in his mantle.

"Rise, rise, my lord, said Nymphidius, reprovingly, "let not thy servants see Cæsar at my feet."

The emperor rose hastily, and casting his eyes wildly round the apartment, observed his sword. He rushed and seized it. As he held it in a position to receive his fall, another shout still closer rang through the palace. The sword fell from his hand. He stood fixed to the spot. The drops fell profusely from his brow. His eyes glared fearfully. "Not yet, not yet. *I dare not*," fell brokenly from him, and twining his fingers in his damp and matted hair, he rushed from the chamber.

"The game prospers," said the Præfect, coolly, as he smiled at the weakness and terror of his prince. "The people shall be backed by the prætorians. This night the latter shall desert their posts at the palace, and join their comrades in the camp. The days of Nero are numbered, and Galba shall wear the Cæsars' crown."

CHAPTER IV.

LOVE AND MISERY.

THE wretched man, with the delusive hope of suffering, had but exchanged one place of torment for another. The criminal, by flight from the spot of his guilt, hopes to bury its memories, and still those murmurs of conscience which rise like curses, "not loud but deep" from the grave of his victim. But though

the external world may change its aspect and features, the heart and mind are still the same. Conscience, like a persevering anatomist, still holds the probe and cautery to the wound. And though Nature may smile and bloom in the place of his retreat, though the skies be blue, and the sun gleam with his accustomed brightness, yet guilt, with her sable curtain obscures the face of day, and makes creation a darkness and a blank.

He had fled from one chamber only to be haunted in another with the shadows of fear and crime which harrowed and persecuted him. As he hurried rapidly through the passages, he seemed to be pursued by the lashes of the Furies, yet shuddered to advance, when the very floor at every step was stained with crimson. Still, on he rushed, his gait tottering and uneven, his eyes wandering and wild, and his hands locked in earnestness for protection from the gods, as every footstep sent its hollow echo through the vacant space.

He at length reached a small ante-chamber connected with his own private apartment, and flinging himself with violence on a couch, burying his face in his hands, the harrowings of fear were succeeded by the bitterness of grief. Through his locked hands the tears gushed profusely, but the spirit of repentance slumbered, while grief and terror unlocked the fountains of nature. Where the mind is harassed, the body partakes its restless uneasiness. He started from his couch, and paced the chamber.

"The gods—the gods vouchsafe their aid!" groaned the guilty man. "Ha! back—back, I say, thou blood-stained shade," he continued, clasping his hands to his eyes, as imagination bodied forth the spectre of his own thoughts; "back, there's blood upon that hand—those eyes that frown—Jupiter! shield, protect thy servant!" Pale and shivering he sank upon his knees, his hands still firmly clasped to his eyes; he slowly withdrew them, and surveying the apartment with a hurried and trembling glance, rose from the ground. "Fool, fool," he murmured, "what can'st thou see? 'Tis here—here—the vulture preys, and the fires waste and burn—ha! do I dream?" he

continued in a recollective tone, as though fear had broken the chain of connected thought. "Why stand I here parleying with conscience, when murder even stalks through my palace? They would have me fly! Alas! alas! whither? Hark! what sound was that?" he paused and listened. In that breathless moment not a sound was heard. "Fool!" he said, in a tone of bitterness, "I am my own torture. Flight were impossible—the prætorians have joined the rabble, and the sentinels at the gate would seize me." Fear and uncertainty, while they distracted his mind, broke the link of his thoughts. He wandered from theme to theme, at one moment forming designs for his safety, at another shuddering at the vivid recollection of his crimes. Even his hours of relaxation rose, as it were, to taunt his misery and embitter it by contrast. The part of *Œdipus*, which he had so frequently personated, rushed to his memory with the coloring of "a mind diseased," and the language of fiction realizing the agonies of his condition, he exclaimed, "My wife, my father, and my mother doom me dead. Dead—dead!" he continued, as the pale terrors of the image seemed to blanch his cheek and lips; "dead! 'Tis but a moment, and the pain is past—this, this shall end it." He drew from his bosom a small vial and was presenting it to his lips, when the door of the apartment opening, disclosed the form of *Actæ*. Shame and indignation flung their shadow athwart his countenance, as he felt the attempted deed bespoke his fear. It was but a moment—the vial was snatched from his hand, the Asiatic was clasped to his heart, and the whisperings of guilt and fear were for the moment lost in the soft and seductive tones of his mistress.

"Wherefore here?" said Nero, hastily, his face averted from the lovely form he clasped, and the shame of detection subduing his words to a whisper.

"Nay, ask me not," replied the affectionate slave, clinging to him with that tenderness and passion, which dignify the character of woman in the hour of affliction. "Where *Cæsar* is,

even there should his slave be also. Thinkest thou, my lord," she continued, her dark eyes kindling with the pride of exalted feeling, "that it is the part of woman only to tempt the stream, when its still and sleeping bosom mirrors back the image of a sunshine-heaven? Or thinkest thou the flower she has tended with a sister's care through the summer's day, she will not raise from the ground, though it be chilled and blasted by the winter air? Yea, press to her heart those withered leaves, in memory of love and hope that have faded like the brightness of that flower? Think not 'tis woman's part to share the hours of joy and happiness, to echo mirth, or paint the smile, and yet leave misery to the sad companionship of a lone and sinking heart."

As she spoke the tears fell quickly, from the ardor and sincerity of her love, and twining her delicate arms around his convulsed and trembling frame, imprinted on his cheek that kiss which betrays not—the seal of woman's love. Nero stood silent in her embrace, shame and terror struggled for the mastery within, and pride forbade him even to regard her, who, though woman, could inspire suffering with strength.

"Speak, speak, my lord," she continued with earnestness, still more fondly clasping him to her bosom; "speak, and tell thy slave that in misery and sorrow thou lovest her still!"

"Misery!" ejaculated Nero, while he pressed his hand to his eyes to subdue the rising tears. "Misery! I am miserable. Hunted for my life, by those whose praises were as false as the breath that made them. Misery! name it not, my girl; 'tis here—here—it gnaws like the adder's fang."

He broke from her clasp, and declining his head on his breast, his expressions became stifled and broken.

"Leave me—leave me," he said falteringly, "if these be my last moments, let not a woman witness the tears of *Cæsar*."

The emphasis seemed for a moment to rekindle the dying spark of kingly pride; but like the brief resuscitation of vital energy, ere the lamp be extinguished, it only lent the stronger

contrast to the weakness and prostration which succeeded. The pride of the *king* subsided in the terrors of the *man*, and Nero could not repress the tears, more bitter when shed in the presence of a woman.

"Leave me," he said, bitterly.

"I sought thee not, my lord," replied the Asiatic artlessly, and approaching, once more embracing him: "I sought thee not to part so soon. I came, not as one who brings no comfort, but to listen to the grief she cannot silence, and the tears she cannot dry."

"Comfort!" responded Nero, while the ardor of her embrace, and the "gentleness of her voice," that most excellent thing in woman, for the moment dissolved the spell which bound him to the sense of his condition. "Comfort! Where—"

"Here," responded Acté, interrupting him, "even in the arms of her thou lovest, and who, through weal or suffering, will requite thee with that priceless treasure thou hast confided to her keeping—rich as the day thou gav'st it her, for time hath not decayed it: and pure as the stream whose mirror is stirred not, save by the breath of heaven."

"My own—my faithful one!" said Nero, after a pause, regarding her, his expression borrowing a tenderness from the tones which fell as soft as a train of the æolian, amid the wintry blast which awakes its music. "My own! Wilt *thou* alone, of all who have smiled to deceive, still cling to me amid the storms which beset and threaten me? Yet," he continued, after a moment's pause, steadfastly gazing on her lovely face and almost compassionating the self-devotion which shuddered not at death, "Yet I would not have thee cling, Acté, so reckless in thy love. Thou art even now as a fair flower of the spring, clasping thy tendrils round a rude and storm-beaten tree. If I must fall," he said, his voice weakened by emotion, "let not the blast which crusheth me, wither thy young and beautiful stem also."

"As I have lived, so will I die with thee," replied Acté, pas-

sionately; "tear me not from that fate which passion defies, while it consecrates the pile. Be it in the palace, the retreat of persecution, or the hour of disgrace, as our hearts have been twined so let our loves be. Thou hast raised me to the throne, and I will leave it but with thee. The love of woman, though it may bloom in the bright and fragrant hour of summer, can spring also in the wastes of grief, or shed its perfume on the winter air."

The slave sank her head upon his breast, and the tears which passion shed were answered by the throbs of grief.

"Away, away! with these woman's weapons," exclaimed Nero impatiently, starting from the reverie into which agony and doubt had plunged him; "this is no time for grief, and if it were—"

"Let thy tears fall here, even on the heart which is thine," cried the Asiatic, extending towards him her arms, imploringly.

"Not now, not now," uttered Nero, endeavoring to rally the thoughts their interview had interrupted. "Not now. Safety—danger—flight," he added, brokenly.

"Where *thou* goest will I go," exclaimed Actè, clinging still more earnestly to the hand he endeavored to wrest from her.

"Ha, thy words sound like an omen!" retorted Nero, as he tore himself from her and hid his face in his hands.

A deep and hollow groan rang through the apartment. The words. "he leaves me!" followed in a stifled, inaudible tone. Nero turned, and beheld the prostrate form of his mistress. Her cheek was white, her brow calm and composed, and a smile still hovered round that half-open, chiselled lip, as though love and hope wreathed their garlands around the cypress-wand of grief. He stooped and kissed her, and, casting on the form a look of agony and despair, darted from the chamber.

CHAPTER V.

THE FLIGHT.

The goadings of crime, the apprehension of instant death, and the incapability of satiating vengeance on those whom wrongs and persecution had invested with a superior power, rose within the tyrant, as, in flight, he cast a lingering look upon the palace of his pride, his power and his guilt. Mingled with the ceaseless cries of a sanguinary and determined mob, rose the sweet and silvery tones of her whose attachment had, for the moment, subdued the horrors of his fate, and lent a respite to its pain. It fell on his anxious and nervous sense like the music of the mermaid's voice, when she sports amid the strife of the waters, and braids her tresses which float on the wing of the tempest. "He leaves me," dwelt on his memory with a melancholy, anticipative of a separation, he *felt*, would be final. Still, on he rushed: he knew, he cared not whither. In the delirium of the moment he sank on his knees, and supplicated Jupiter that the earth might yawn, and Curtius-like, that he might sink into her womb. The dread silence which prevailed around, giving to prayer the mockery of its own echo, fell on him with the appalling sense that even the gods had forsaken him. He started from his knees, and uttered a shriek of wildness and terror. He clasped his hands to his eyes, as amid the shades of evening he descried a figure rapidly approaching. He flew from the spot; he stopped for a moment, but could not summon resolution sufficient even to look behind. The footsteps became still more audible. He was evidently pursued. Flight was his only refuge, and his last hope was to anticipate the blow of his enemy. Fear and despair lending rapidity to his flight, he darted onwards. He was not far from the Tiber, and on the moment resolved that its water should be his tomb.

He was already on its banks—the footsteps rapidly gained on him—he stooped over the edge, the clear cold stars were sleeping on its bosom—he involuntarily started back, as, in the attitude to plunge, his reflected image met his eye. A momentary courage throbbed within his heart, like the deceptive gleam of hope which lights the eye of the dying man; he drew his sword, and resolved to withstand the comer.

Tears and surprise for the moment suspended the power of utterance, as he recognized in the voice of the stranger, his freedman, Phaon. The faithful servant, kneeling, pressed to his lips his master's quivering hand.

"Rise, rise," said Nero, hastily, "this is no time for the cold forms of duty. Save thy prince; or even where he stands let thy hand end his pain." As he spoke the tears gushed freely, and with a tremulous hand and averted face, he presented Phaon with his sword. "Strike!" cried Nero, in a hollow, trembling tone.

In silence he awaited the fatal blow, and turning round, beheld the sword at his freedman's feet. "How is this?" he exclaimed, his voice scarcely strong enough to assume the tone of anger, "how is this? Said I not to thee, strike? Would'st see thy master hunted like a beast, when *thou* couldst save him from their fangs?"

"My lord," replied Phaon, "I will save thee, but not at the point of thine own sword. Nor shall it be said, I showed my love by an act of bloodshed."

As Nero heard the last word his face became still more ghastly, heavy drops coursed his contracted brow, and his whole frame was affected by a violent shudder. He tottered to the shoulder of his freedman, and leaned on him for support. In that one word, as in a mirror, the guilty man reviewed his whole life of cruelty and horror.

"My lord trembles," said Phaon, as the emotion of Nero rendered it difficult to preserve his station.

"I—I—it will soon pass," rejoined his master, with hesita-

tion, endeavoring to suppress the agitation which betrayed his fears. "Speak, speak!" continued Nero, after a pause, "save me if thou canst. Whither wilt thou lead me? Where can I hide till this storm subsides, and my pursuers weary? Speak, speak!"

His eyes, glowing and dilated, were fixed upon Phaon in the agony of suspense and fear; and as the freedman met their glance, he involuntarily shuddered at their wild and distorted expression.

"I will lead thee," replied Phaon, after a pause, "where hatred cannot pursue, nor suspicion find thee—even to my own villa. The obscurity of the place will favor thy concealment. It is but four miles distant from Rome. Cæsar shall be safe beneath his freedman's roof. I will watch thee by night, and desert thee not through day. Fear me not," continued the freedman, with a fidelity worthy of a better object. "I will maintain a secret communication with the city, and thou shalt know as well the proceedings of the senate as the people."

"Thanks, thanks!" exclaimed Nero, seizing his favorite's hand, the terrors and humiliation of the moment merging all sense of distinction; "thanks—I fly with thee this moment. We cannot enter the palace privately. We must provide ourselves with steeds."

On entering the gate of the palace in disguise and haste, they found no impediment to their progress, nor any disposed to question their purpose. The palace in the absence of its master, seemed to have forgotten its splendor and pride, and had already assumed an air of loneliness and desolation. It resembled, to its awe-stricken monarch as he stood within the solitary space before it, a temple, in whose destruction and neglect the wrath of the gods had anticipated the decay of time. Huge and dark it rose against the midnight sky, the starlight but faintly depicting the irregularity of its outline, or brightening the dense shadow which slumbered on it like a cloud.

Disaffection and revolt were evidently progressing with a fearful certainty, for the gates were deserted, and the prætorians had already joined their associates in the camp.

Nero paused for a moment, to contemplate the surrounding wreck and desolation. Grief and despair could no longer be restrained—a deep groan burst from him—it rolled through the surrounding space—it echoed like the lamentations of Ruin, when she weeps amid the solitude she has made.

CHAPTER VI.

THE TYRANT'S END.

At dawn of day the tyrant commenced his last and fearful journey. The decay of power was marked in the scantiness of his retinue. No courtiers followed in his train, to flatter and vaunt his praises to the sky. Not a prætorian followed the blighted fortunes of his master. He whose minstrelsy, poetry, and dramatic attainments had called forth the exulting shouts of his people, and extorted even decrees from a senate, scarcely less debased and servile, was now flying as a slave from the very city where he had ruled as lord; and companionless, save in two attendants, was glad to abandon the pride of a palace for the humble security of an obscure villa.

With the mysterious silence of men whose errand may be death, the forlorn party slowly emerged from the palace-gate. Not a word was exchanged. They even shuddered to look upon each other, lest fear, too palpable in the visage of each, might daunt the courage despair had given. The small body followed in a line. Phaon, with an attachment which might have borrowed lustre from a better cause, led the way, his arm prepared for any casual resistance, and his eye vigilant for any enemy who might oppose their expedition. The wretched fugitive, divested of all imperial insignia and wearing nothing

save a close tunic, covered by an old and tattered cloak for the purpose of disguise, followed his freedman. His head was partially covered by the cloak, and his face concealed by a handkerchief he held before it. In this sorry and degraded plight followed *the emperor of Rome*. The rear was closed by Epaphroditus, his secretary, whose fidelity shrank not from sharing the vicissitudes of his master's fortunes.

They had just cleared the palace, as the rising day flung its cold grey mist on its huge and sombre mass. A dismal gloom hung on every object, which even the renovating touch of light seemed unable to clear or dispel. The spirit of darkness still slumbered there, as though light, and life, and all the refreshing influences of day, refused to bestow their gifts where guilt and bloodshed had so long fixed their abode. A mist, deeper and heavier than the gathering shades of evening, spread like a curtain, blending into one vast, indistinguishable pile the variations of shape and outline. He checked his steed for a moment, and flung on it a last look, in which memory painted the revival of many a scene of horror; and, as unable any longer to endure the strife within, waving his hand to Phaon, the troop pushed their horses to a gallop.

Rigid and immoveable as statues, they bestrode their steeds. The hands of his attendants were braced to their sword-hilts. Not a word escaped them, as they sped on their way. The rigid firmness of the horseman bespoke his resolve not to quit his seat with life.

As thus they advanced, a wild and discordant shout broke the surrounding silence. The horses pricked their ears, and the firmness of their riders was disconcerted by surprise and uncertainty. They checked their steeds abruptly, while Phaon and Epaphroditus unsheathed their swords. The steadiness and resolution of his followers, was strongly contrasted by the fear and cowardice of their prince. The bridle fell from his hand, and his steed becoming unruly, was seized and checked by Phaon. The shout had died away, and a stillness deep and

grave-like succeeded. It was once again broken by a clamor from the same quarter, wilder and louder than the last, and accompanied by expressions so plainly heard, as at once to announce to the tyrant the certainty of his doom and the inutility of flight. The words "Galba! Galba!" came distinctly on the wind. Animation seemed to forsake his cheek, and uttering with difficulty, "It is the prætorians—fly!" their journey was resumed at a quickened pace.

They were not far from the freedman's villa; their horses, at the same time, pushed almost to full speed. On a sudden the steed of Nero drew up abruptly, his ears were drawn back, and he snuffed the air with violence. The faithful Phaon dismounted, and seizing the bridle, endeavored to lead him forward. The animal only retrograded more violently, and rearing, almost dislodged his rider from his seat. The emperor could not restrain his impatience and fear, but vented both in words of threat and execration. The delay seemed ominous of advantage to the speed of his pursuers. Phaon, unable to account for the obstinacy of the animal, relinquished the bridle for a moment, and cast his eyes searchingly around him. The cause at length met his view, and he started back with instinctive horror. As Nero looked on his terror-stricken countenance, fear suppressed curiosity; at length, in a muffled and indistinct tone, scarcely removing the handkerchief from his face, he said, "Speak—quick—what seest thou?"

"The form of death," replied Phaon; "unburied lies a corse by the road-side.

"Curses on this steed!" muttered Nero, "they may be on us even now."

As he spoke, he lashed the horse violently, the noble animal reared as before, and casting a side-long glance where lay the object of its timidity, plunged forward.

The suddenness of the motion jerked the veil from Nero's hand, which he had hitherto held to his face. Misfortune seemed to insert her threads in the very web which hope was

weaving. At that moment a veteran, who had been dismissed the service, passed. He at once recognized his master, and saluted him by name. Nero hastily waved his hand—he was discovered—his flight would, no doubt, soon reach the city. "Forward!" he exclaimed, at the very top of his voice, Their horses were now at full speed.

The expected asylum at length rose to view. Within a short space of it they dismounted, and counselled as to the policy of future measures.

"It were not safe to enter it by the public gate, my lord," said Phaon, "your person may be recognized. Informers are frequent. Servants are seldom proof against the gold which buys their master."

"I am in thy power, good Phaon," rejoined Nero, "resolve, and quickly, for my safety."

"Thine entrance into the house," said Phaon, hastily, "must be private. Cross that field, and lie concealed till I have made a passage for thee in that remote wall of the house. Leave thy steed with me. Epaphroditus and I will do all."

The wretched man listened to the stratagem with the meekness of a child who bears submissively from his elders what he dares not resist or dispute. He cast on them a look, more expressive from its silence, and hastened to the appointed spot.

Faint with excitement and fear, the wretch stooped and raised in the hollow of his hand, some impure water from a ditch. "Is this, then, the cup they have reduced Cæsar to drain?" he said, while the tears mingled with the water. "Well, well, so the draught is no bitterer, I am content."

As he raised his eyes to the appointed quarter of the house, he observed a hand waving him onward. It was Phaon's. He darted to the spot with the precipitancy of one to whom speed was life, and with difficulty was squeezed through the excavation they had made.

The field he had quitted was scarcely more barren or deso-

tate than the apartment to which he was now conducted, and which was destined to witness the last struggle of Rome's emperor. The walls and floor were not only destitute of covering, but defaced with squalor and filth. He surveyed it for some moments in silence, but could no longer restrain the bitterness of insulted pride, and the degradation which met him at every step. He burst violently into tears, and fell on a mean and tattered couch, the only furniture in the apartment. While he lay, alternately the victim of grief and passion, his attendants, who had withdrawn to the remote end of the chamber for the purpose of conference, approached him.

"Danger presses, my lord," said Phaon, kneeling, "and there is but little hope. They who have met us on the road will conjecture thy retreat, from bearing my company." He paused to observe the effect of his words, and the tone of his master's feelings. "It is but a moment," he proceeded with hesitation, "and the cares of life are forgotten, and with them the hatred of thine enemies."

"Must I then die?" said the tyrant, slowly rising from the couch, and surveying the naked chamber with a wild and glassy eye, "Must I then die? Is there no hope?"

"None," replied Phaon.

Courage and resolution seemed to rise with the answer. He hastily dashed the tears from his eyes—his manner became firm and collected. "If they hunt they shall not reach me, this day shall be my last. Let my pile be collected, and mark, let not a Cæsar sleep without a monument—I would have some marble on my grave."

His momentary firmness forsook him, and, turning his face to the couch, the violence of his grief sent a dull and heavy echo through the chamber.

Footsteps were heard in the passage, and immediately a messenger, according to the private instructions of Phaon entering, presented him with papers. "From Rome?" said Phaon, in a subdued tone.

The words acted with the power of a talisman on Nero, who recognized in them the consummation of hope or despair; and, starting from the couch, he seized the packet. He perused it with eagerness, but the tears which fell, and the trembling of his hands and frame, fully interpreted the nature of the intelligence.

"A public enemy"—"ancient usage"—were the only words they could hear. "They have outlawed me from mine own realm," he said at length, with difficulty summoning courage to speak of his fate, "and the Fathers have condemned me to die, according to the rigor of ancient usage." His voice failed him, and the tears which choked it, were exchanged for a violent transport of rage. He tore the papers into fragments, and trampled on them. He folded his arms with sternness, and his figure for the moment assumed a rigid composure. "What is ancient usage?" he asked after a pause.

The attendants, as unwilling to disclose the severity of the punishment decreed, exchanged silent looks. The task at length fell on Phaon.

"Pardon, my lord," he said "the question and your condition demand truth for the answer. It was the law of the old republic, that every traitor should die a lingering death beneath the rod of the Lictor; his head fastened between two stakes, and his body entirely naked."

An agonized expression, combining shame and pain, overspread the countenance of Nero, as he heard this detail. He started from the spot, as though he already writhed beneath the stripes of the Lictor. He stopped short again—his respiration became short and hysterical—he drew from his bosom two poignards, and feeling their sharpness gazed on them intently. He suddenly turned to his attendants, and extending the daggers—"Has none," he cried with bitterness, "the courage to show me how to die?"

The words were no sooner uttered, than the trampling of horses was heard at hand. A troop of soldiers instantly enter-

ed the room, and surrounded the door. Nero saw that hope was at an end—the monarch had indeed fallen from the high estate, which once commanded the flattery of men. The officer disregarded all obeisance, and proceeded to disclose the nature of his mission.

“The Fathers,” he said, “have decreed Cæsar as traitor, and ordered him into my custody, to be conveyed back to Rome to suffer punishment. Soldiers, your duty!”

Two or three advanced to seize him, but despair at length nerving resolution, he stabbed himself in the throat. The blood flowed copiously, but the wound was not mortal; he tottered for a moment, and fell to the ground. His eyes wandered around the chamber with the languor of exhaustion, as imploring some friendly hand to complete the work. “Will ye,” he at length exclaimed in tears, “will ye see Cæsar without a friend?”

Epaphroditus rushing forward, seized a dagger. and having previously marked the fatal spot, with averted face plunged it into Nero’s bosom.

A violent shudder convulsed his frame, and, raising himself slowly from the ground and casting on the officer a smile of triumph and derision, the last of the Cæsars was no more.

“So great,” says Suetonius, “was the joy exhibited at Rome upon the intelligence of his death, that the people ran to and fro through the city, with caps on their heads.”

The ominous acclamations of the prætorians were realized, and Galba shortly afterwards entered Rome as its future emperor.

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